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TNH3005-Standing a Stallion to the Public

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EQUIFACTS

Standing a Stallion to the Public

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Most breeding farms or stallion owners must depend on stallion service income (breeding fees) from outside (public) mares to financially support the total horse operation. Since standing a stallion does have financial consequences, it is very important to understand some basic management concepts when standing a stallion to the public.

Most stallion owners initially purchase a stallion to breed their own mares. However, by breeding outside mares, the stallion owner is able to reduce the fixed costs of owning a stallion, increase the number of mares bred and subsequently increase the number of foals available to evaluate the stallion as a sire. In addition, by breeding outside mares, the traffic and visitors to the breeding farm are increased. This increases the potential to breed additional mares, sell foals and broodmares, board mares and hopefully increase the overall profitability of the breeding farm.

This fact sheet addresses such fundamentals as stallion selection criteria, labor and facility considerations, breeding fees, personnel, mare care, advertising, communication, and breeding contracts.

Stallion Selection

Obviously, one of the first considerations to be addressed is the selection of a stallion. The first concept is that only good stallions make a profit. Therefore, if you are to be successful in the breeding business, it is important to stand a quality stallion. Basically, three

things ultimately determine the worth of a superior breeding stallion:

- (1) a desirable pedigree;
- (2) the desired and preferred conformational traits; and
- (3) the desired performance traits or the ability to sire superior performing individuals.

How well the stallion excels in these three areas will determine the stallion's ability to make a genetic contribution to the horse industry.

It is still important for the stallion to be attractive and well-conformed, even though a stallion may be totally used as a performance sire. Furthermore, a stallion with a fashionable or popular pedigree will contribute to the successful marketing of the progeny. An attractive, well-conformed yearling colt with a fashionable pedigree is much easier to market than a similar colt with a less popular pedigree.

Color

Color of the stallion is a factor that has to be considered when standing a stallion. Interest in breeds with a distinct color patterns, such as American Paint Horses, Palominos and Appaloosas, has been increasing, so color genetics play an important role in stallion selection. In cases where color has major emphasis in a breeding program, the stallion

owner must thoroughly research available information and market considerations of both acceptable and non-acceptable color patterns of the respective breeds.

In most breeds, there are color biases within all the acceptable colors in the breed. It would be in the best interest of the stallion owner to know those biases and select the stallion accordingly. However, it should be pointed out that in most non-color oriented breeds, color is of secondary concern to superior genetics, conformation and performance factors. Breeding for color is sometimes trendy and long term breeding commitments to color alone may be risky.

Breeding Fee

A major consideration that a stallion owner must determine is the stallion service or breeding fee. Two philosophies exist relative to this matter. First, a stallion owner may limit the number of outside mares with a high breeding fee. Many stallion owners think this is advisable because of the marketing advantages of a smaller number of foals. Additionally, the quality of the mares bred to stallions with higher breeding fees is generally superior, resulting in an exceptional foal crop.

However, many horse breeding farms have been successful breeding a larger number of mares at a lower breeding fee. Typically, the quality of offspring may be reduced, but breeding income is increased. The stallion owner ultimately has to make the decision based on the breeding income needed to support the horse farm and on realistic expectations of the stallion in future breeding seasons.

Location

The perception of stallion quality and acceptability is often determined by where the stallion is standing at stud. The horse breeding business is not always a science. Many mare owners make breeding decisions based on unrealistic perceptions. A good example of this situation is breeding to a Thoroughbred stallion. Many Tennessee mare owners will breed to a Kentucky Thoroughbred stallion instead of a Tennessee stallion. In doing so, they will pay substantially higher breeding fees, along with higher mare care and veterinary expenses for no other reason than the stallion was in Kentucky. Although the increased

costs may not be justified, the situation continues to exist.

Another consideration is that the stallion must be compatible with the locale. This has several implications. Generally speaking, the stallion offered to the public should be of the same breed as the mare population in the area. For example, it would be more difficult to stand an Arabian stallion for a profit in an area dominated by Quarter Horse mares than a Quarter Horse stallion. Conversely, the same would be true.

Facilities

It is imperative to maintain an attractive, clean, well-maintained breeding farm. Mare owners are more likely to take their mares to a clean, well-maintained breeding farm. It gives them a sense of security that their mares will be safe. The breeding farm should be accessible with adequate highways and roads. Visibility from major interstates and highways is advantageous but certainly not mandatory for a successful breeding farm.

When standing a stallion, the breeding farm owners must not only consider the attractiveness of a farm but also the design of the facility to accommodate a breeding program. An additional component that will affect the facility design and construction is the use of a natural or artificial breeding program. A natural breeding program may be able to complete a successful breeding season with less elaborate facilities than an artificial breeding program. However, pasture breeding a stallion will greatly reduce the amount of facilities needed. Hand mating programs may require facilities similar to those required in artificial breeding.

Artificially breeding a stallion may allow the stallion to increase the number of mares bred over natural breeding by fourfold, greatly increasing income-earning potential. However, this increased income will be offset somewhat by increased facility demand, improved and additional management skills, increased labor and generally higher veterinary costs. Artificial insemination is prohibited in some breeds; therefore, the stallion owner should take into account breed regulations when purchasing a stallion.

Regardless of the type of breeding program at a farm, labor is a primary consideration. The qualities or personal traits of a breeding

farm worker are critical to a successful program. In today's competitive breeding market, image is paramount. Generally the first impression of a breeding farm may be projected through a farm laborer, not the manager or owner. The image or perception of a mare owner greatly influences stallion selection. Professional, well-trained employees who have a good understanding of business principles and horse farm knowledge can have a real impact on success or failure of a stallion. A greatly overlooked tool for success of a stallion breeding farm is farm labor and management. An Agricultural Extension Service publication PB 1410 **Farm Labor Management** will provide additional information and is available from county Agricultural Extension Service offices.

Mare Care

All mares should receive top-quality care and attention. Providing low quality mare care to outside mares is a blueprint for failure in the horse breeding business. Mare owners will gladly pay for excellent mare care. However, they will not return their mare to a breeding farm that has given them poor mare management or allowed their foal to become ill.

Communication

Communication is also a key to a successful breeding establishment. Breeding farms must keep the mare owners informed of the breeding progress and current status of the mare. A weekly report is an ideal way to build a lasting relationship between the breeding farm and mare owner. Additionally, an ultrasound picture of the embryo included with a weekly report is a very effective communication tool. Communication is a must to be a successful horse breeder.

Veterinary Services

Veterinary services at a breeding farm can have a definite impact on conception rates and the overall health environment of the farm. A qualified equine veterinarian working hand in hand with the breeding farm managers can reduce expenses to mare owners by getting the mares in foal and returned home as quickly as possible. The degree of involvement of the veterinarian varies widely among breeding farms. Some farms have resident veterinarians who participate actively on a daily

basis. On other farms, a local veterinarian makes visits only as called.

It is extremely important that the billing party, whether it is the breeding farm or veterinarian, provide uniform billing to all mare owners for similar veterinary service. A list of fees for normal services rendered should be made available to prospective breeding farm customers. In addition, the availability of ultrasound to assist the veterinarian in ovulation and pregnancy determination may be a consideration to mare owners.

Promotion

An advertising program should be outlined well in advance of the breeding season. The availability of funds to advertise and promote a stallion is an important consideration when standing a stallion. The quality of the stallion, the breeding fee and the desired mares will in part determine the scope of an advertising campaign. Minimum promotion of a stallion should be done at least on a local basis, with regional advertisement preferable.

Stallion Service Contract

Breeding farms must have a contract for breeding, commonly referred to as a "stallion service contract." The stallion owner must set a breeding fee and should not deviate from the established service fee. Many stallion owners get into trouble by making deals with friends, neighbors and other mare owners. In the long term, these deals generally cost the stallion owners friends and money, opposite of the original intention. The stallion service contract takes all the gentlemen's agreements and guess work out of the breeding program. After the stallion service contract has been signed, the stallion and mare owner know what is expected of each other, which leads to a happier situation for both parties.

There are many items that can be included in the stallion service contract. Obviously, the stallion's service fee must be included, along with the amount of the booking fee, a fee required to guarantee service to a stallion. It is also important to note when the balance of the stallion service fee must be paid. The stallion service contract should also contain fees for mare and foal care and when these fees are payable. If known, normal veterinary charges can be included in the contract.

A stallion service contract should also include health requirements of the mare. All

breeding farms in Tennessee must require mares entering the breeding farm to have a negative Coggins Test within the previous 12 months. Some breeding farms also require such vaccinations as Eastern and Western encephomyelitis, influenza and rhinopneumonitis.

A statement on the "release of liability" of the mare from the mare owner should be included in the contract. It should also be stated in the contract when the mare owner will receive the breeder's certificate. Most contracts include a guaranteed live foal. The definition for a live foal should be given. The most common one is that the foal stands and nurses unaided. Some contracts state that a foal must survive at least 72 hours to qualify as a live foal.

The contract needs to state what rights the mare owner has if the mare turns up open, aborts or the foal does not survive. It also should list the time and conditions under which a rebreeding must occur. The contract should also indicate the rebreeding alternative of the mare and stallion owner if the mare or stallion dies, becomes infertile or is sold. Horse owners interested in developing a stallion service contract should obtain copies of

contracts from reputable breeding farms to use as guidelines for their own contract.

Summary

Standing a stallion can be profitable and rewarding to a stallion owner. However, basic business concepts must be followed. A breeding farm should not be operated any differently than any other business. The stallion owner can eliminate many potential problems with a thorough understanding of the horse breeding business and by applying principles of organization and management to the breeding farm. The stallion owner must also be aware of zoning restrictions and state regulations regarding the standing of a stallion.

The impression of a mare owner toward a breeding farm will have a direct influence on the profitability of the stallion(s). The attractiveness of the barn, cleanliness of the stalls and area and the availability of quality feeds and forages will have an impact on the mare owner. Successful breeding farms will be easy to work with and treat mare owners with respect, whether they have one or 15 mares to breed.

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