Raising an orphan foal is a tremendous amount of work, Paradis said, and it requires a committed caregiver. She also recommended slowly mixing normal grain and forage with milk replacer and delaying weaning until the three-week mark. "The healthy foal does not have difficulty in handling this excess," she explained. "However, if you are feeding more than the foal can manage, you may want to switch to bottle feeding." While bottle feeding is an acceptable approach, Paradis prefers to tube feed colostrum to ensure foals get as much as possible from their dam. "It's liquid gold," she said. "I don't want to lose a drop."

Paradis noted that while substitutes are designed to have similar nutrient and micronutrient levels as mare’s milk, some variations exist. For instance, she explained, mare’s milk contains roughly 10.7% protein, 16% total solids, 19.5% crude fat, and 0.1% crude fiber. "It's the best thing out there," she said. "You can keep your foal alive on that."

To induce lactation, Paradis said veterinarians typically use hormone treatments consisting of altrenogest and estradiol in combination with oxytocin and sulpiride or domperidone. She noted that it takes up to 14 days for lactation to begin with this method, so supplemental foal feeding will be required. She also noted that some mares have produced a small amount of colostrum. However, this amount is insufficient to meet the foal’s needs, so supplemental feeding is necessary. "If you are going to feed your foal from a bottle, you should use colostrum," she said. "It’s the first milk your dam made and it’s packed with antibodies and nutrients." Regular feeding of supplemental milk is as important as the frequency of meals. "We’re talking about 16 times per day, with the frequency decreasing to five times daily by the time they reach three weeks," she explained. "You’re essentially feeding them as much as they want, within the confines of their stomach capacity and you’ve got to get them to digest it."

Mares that are still nursing their own foals might be reluctant to graft an orphan. Avoid this situation if possible. Often, she said, mares are the bigger challenge when it comes to grafting orphan foals, as “hungry” mares can be difficult to manage. "For instance, she explained, mare’s milk contains roughly 10.7% protein, 16% total solids, 19.5% crude fat, and 0.1% crude fiber. "It's the best thing out there," she said. "You can keep your foal alive on that."

There are several options for obtaining milk for orphan foals, Paradis said, and she discussed three in detail. The first option is to induce lactation in a barren mare. "To induce lactation, Paradis said veterinarians typically use hormone treatments consisting of altrenogest and estradiol in combination with oxytocin and sulpiride or domperidone. She noted that it takes up to 14 days for lactation to begin with this method, so supplemental foal feeding will be required. She also noted that some mares have produced a small amount of colostrum. However, this amount is insufficient to meet the foal’s needs, so supplemental feeding is necessary. "If you are going to feed your foal from a bottle, you should use colostrum," she said. "It’s the first milk your dam made and it’s packed with antibodies and nutrients." Regular feeding of supplemental milk is as important as the frequency of meals. "We’re talking about 16 times per day, with the frequency decreasing to five times daily by the time they reach three weeks," she explained. "You’re essentially feeding them as much as they want, within the confines of their stomach capacity and you’ve got to get them to digest it."

The second option is to use milk replacer. Milk replacer is a concentrated product that is reconstituted with water. "Milk replacer is a great option," Paradis said, "but it’s not a substitute for mare’s milk."

The third option is to use a nurse mare. "Nurse mares aren’t always easy to find, and you might need to pay to ship one to your area;" she said. "The financial costs involved with the lease (For instance, how much will it cost to get this mare?"

Paradis also recommended breeders and veterinarians prepare for orphan foal arrivals ahead of time. "When a foal is orphaned, it’s important to get the foal to a caregiver as soon as possible," she said. "This will allow the foal to be rehabilitated and prepared for a new home." It’s important to ensure that the foal is healthy and well-nourished before being placed in a new environment. "There are several steps to ensure that this occurs," Paradis said. "First, the foal must be examined by a veterinarian to ensure that it is healthy and free of disease. Second, the foal must be vaccinated and dewormed. Finally, the foal must be given a nutritious diet to ensure that it gains weight and strength."