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Managing Mares in Low-Stress Environments Can Improve Foaling Rates

"Sometimes, some simple commonsense approaches to mare management can make a big difference in reproductive outcome," Blanchard began. He described a study out of Brazil in which the researchers sought to determine whether management strategies centered around horse well-being do, in fact, improve foaling rates. They evaluated 1,206 barren and in-foal Thoroughbred mares over the course of 10 breeding seasons that were divided into "stressed" and "relaxed" groups. The relaxed mares lived in consistent (i.e., mares weren't moved out of or added to the herd group) small groups outside and were not teased prior to breeding. The stressed mares were kept in boxed stalls at night, lived in larger groups on pastures, and were teased individually each day. Based on the study results, barren mares in the relaxed group had significantly higher seasonal pregnancy rates than barren mares in the stressed mares; the in-foal mares in the relaxed group had higher pregnancy rates per cycle; and both barren and in-foal mares in the relaxed groups had a lower incidence of early embryonic death. "Reducing social stress can increase reproductive efficiency and decrease early pregnancy loss," Blanchard said.