

Nutrition and Feeding Management of Broodmares

Pete G. Gibbs and Gary D. Potter*

Horse producers should be concerned about their mares' reproductive performance and ability to mother strong, healthy foals. Economic survival often hinges on mares foaling early in the year, rebreeding quickly and nursing a growing foal that develops soundly. While achieving these goals in a herd of broodmares is dependent upon many factors, nutritional well-being is an important part of an effective broodmare operation.

*Professor and Extension Horse Specialist and Professor and Equine Science Section Leader, Department of Animal Science, The Texas A&M University System.

Broodmares have specific nutritional requirements that differ from other classes of horses. There are differences both in the amount of feed mares need and in the nutrient concentration needed in that feed. Therefore, the broodmare fits into a class of her own.

Body Condition Affects Reproductive Performance

Mare managers should monitor body condition on a regular basis. Historically, there were varying opinions as to the body condition most desirable for pregnant and milking mares. There is no longer

any reason for debate nor controversy.

Research results offer valuable management information relative to the effect of nutrition on reproductive performance in mares. It has been clearly shown that mares should be kept in good condition the year round, and especially as breeding season approaches. By checking the apparent fat cover in mares at the areas shown in Figure 1, managers can assign a numerical condition score to mares. This is important because both mare owners/managers and stallion managers need to be "on the same page" regarding the condition of mares to be bred.

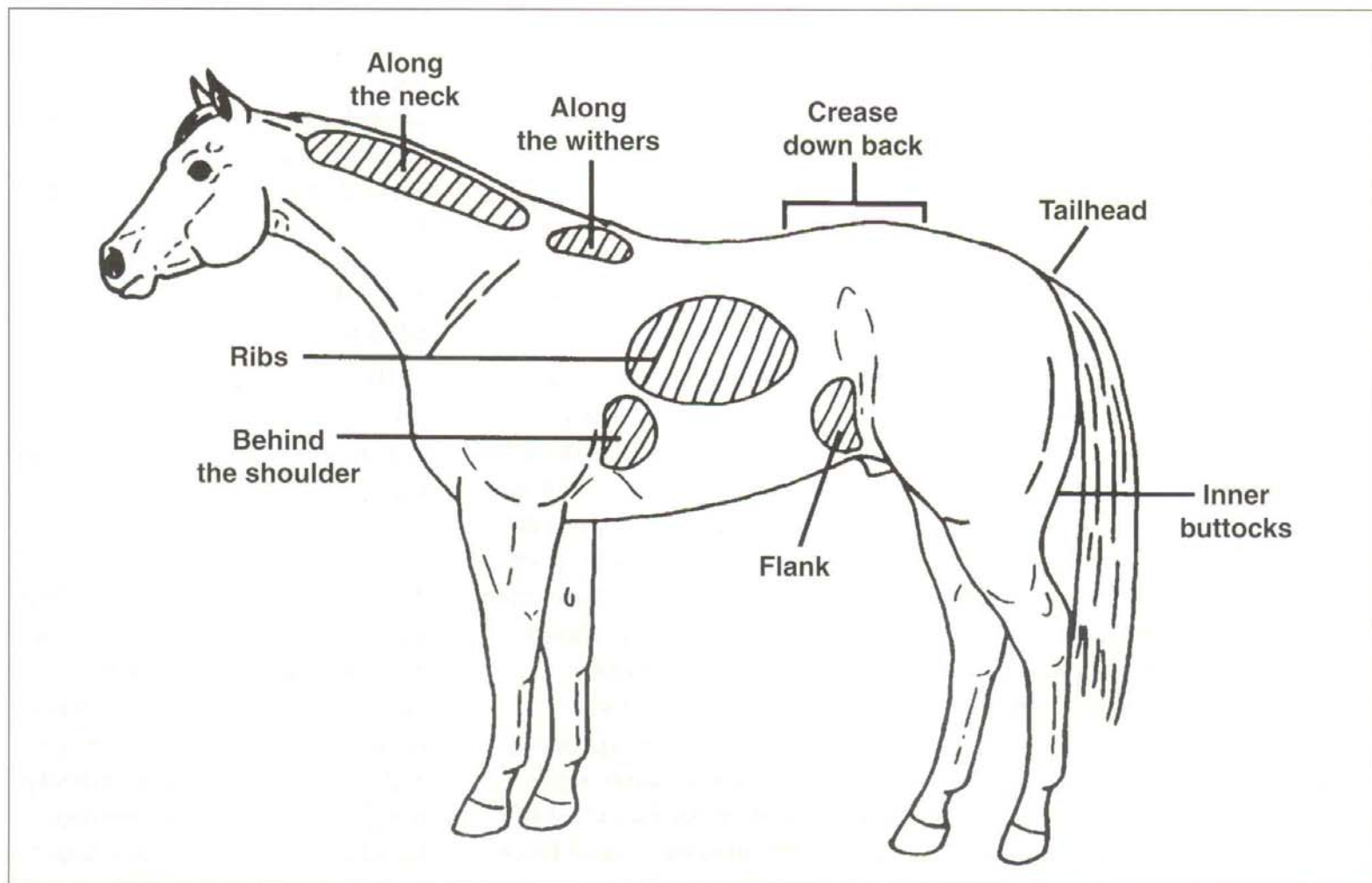


Figure 1. Areas emphasized in the condition score. Adapted from Henneke et al.(1983).