

Seasonality of Breeding Matters to Retailers

Being Retail Ready for Baby Animal Season

Seasonality of livestock breeding matters to farm retailers as products for newborn animals are primarily sold during a short timeframe between November and March. If products aren't on the shelf when needed, the sale is lost. Understanding when the breeding season begins for animals in a specific geography helps prepare for high season, when the majority of births happen. This article will provide understanding about when breeding typically happens for a variety of species and how retailers can use this information to help in planning for seasonal sales opportunities.

Seasonal or not?

Some animal species are seasonal breeders, meaning the amount of daylight animals are exposed to regulates the release of hormones and precursors needed for breeding. For example, goats and sheep are "short day" breeders, so ewes and does begin estrus and can become pregnant when days get shorter. This happens naturally from late summer to early winter. Some breeds of sheep and goats are less seasonal than others. Breeding schedules may be impacted so lambs and kids are available for seasonal demand or shows.

Horses begin estrus when daylight gets longer in early spring and summer. Management can influence when breeding season starts. For example, Thoroughbreds are race-eligible based on age as of January 1st each year. Consequently, many mares are "put under the lights" in late fall. Using artificial lights prepares mares for the traditional February 15th breeding season start date.



Cattle can be bred at any time of the year. Management decisions, economics and weather play a role in dairy and beef cattle breeding programs. Beef producers calve seasonally by design, either in the winter/spring or fall. Some parts of the country utilize fall calving. Dairy producers may implement a seasonal calving system to take advantage of optimal pasture forage. A very important consideration for dairy producers is calving interval. The goal is a 12 month calving interval for dairy cows, so cows are bred based on calving date and not season.

Some important retail considerations for your region include:

- What species and breeds are customers raising?
- What production systems are customers using? Winter, spring or fall calving? Feeding orphaned lambs?
- What has the weather been like? Drought, wet, hot and humid? Lots of forage, or not enough?

How do I use breeding information to help plan my baby animal season?

Last season's sales can certainly help determine when to stock products on the shelves, but what if babies are born earlier than last year? Fluctuations in the breeding season can vary from year-to-year.

Planning questions to ask include:

- What products do I sell during breeding season? When do these sales start to increase?
- Are these products selling earlier, at the same time, or later than they did in past years?
- If product sales trends have changed for these products, what does this mean to sales of baby animal products?
- What other trends in the sales history can impact newborn animal sales?

Planning Helps Dealers, Retailers and Raisers

Gaining an understanding of the species, breed and timing of the birthing season helps dealers & retailers plan, thus improving seasonal sales. In most cases, high season product sales for newborn animals are November- April, but geography is also a determining factor. Learn from raisers when the breeding season starts and remind them to have the supplies on hand when the birthing season begins. Encourage raisers to have a birthing kit that includes a milk replacer made for their animal species, a colostrum replacer or supplement and an electrolyte. Having these emergency items available reduces stress for the raiser and helps improve the outcome should a difficult birth or death of the mother happen. Because demand can increase dramatically during a short timeframe, products like milk replacers and colostrum products can be out of stock when needed most. Review last year's out-of-stock performance prior to placing orders for the upcoming season to avoid being caught short of inventory. Sales history will not provide for prior season lost sales if product wasn't on the shelf when needed. Consider ways to improve in-stock rates and plan for increased demand.

Milk replacers, colostrum products and electrolytes fit a timeframe called the pre-weaned life stage, which lasts from birth to 30-60 days of age. Once these young animals are weaned, the opportunity for newborn product sales is lost, so be ready with products on the shelf when customers need them. Use your knowledge of breeding season and sales history to help plan for the timing and demand baby animal season brings.

Breeding Chart by Season:

Species	Gestation (length of pregnancy)	Typical Breeding Season	Typical Birthing Season	When to Have Product at Retail
Dairy and Beef Cattle	283 days	Year-round, with lower conception in the hottest months	Year round	Year round & ahead of seasonal calving
Goats	145-155 days	Late August-January with highest conception rates late Sept.-Dec.	January-May	December-June
Sheep	143-147 days	August-January with highest conception rates Sept.-Nov.	December-May	November-June
Horses	320-370 days Average is 340 days	February 15-July 4	January-June	December-June