

It's Time to Revisit Frozen Semen

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The use of frozen semen in the equine industry has historically met with some resistance. Difficulty in freezing a quality product, precise timing of insemination as well as specialized storage requirements at the receiving facility have all led many horse breeders to steer clear of using frozen semen. Procedures and products have been refined over the years and it is time to revisit the option of breeding with frozen semen. Why even consider it to begin with?

Frozen semen offers many advantages over traditional shipped cooled semen for both the mare and stallion owner. The stallion can be collected and frozen at a time that accommodates his show and training schedule and then semen can be stored until needed. It can also serve as insurance in case the stallion is taken ill, injured or overbooked on a specific breeding day. The mare owner can receive the semen at the beginning of the breeding season and not worry about being bumped on a collection day due to overbooking or the semen finding its way to another destination when the mare has already been "set-up" to ovulate.

Addressing the need to more closely time insemination to ovulation researchers have established some timed insemination protocols that minimize the need to stay up all night checking mares for ovulation. For example, breeding mares with a dose of frozen semen at 24 and 40 hours after administration of an ovulatory agent (hCG or Deslorelin) has proven effective and allows the practitioner to inseminate at reasonable hours.

The development of specialized freezing extenders and programmable freezers has made it possible to find a successful and repeatable protocol for most stallions. Furthermore, Select Breeders Services Affiliate Laboratories, such as Pioneer Equine Hospital, add centralized quality control measures to ensure that the post-thaw motility and the number of sperm cells per straw are accurately represented and that the semen is free of pathogenic bacteria.

There is still a need for the semen to be stored in a liquid nitrogen tank. Some practices have addressed this issue by sharing a tank between clinics if any one clinic's demand does not warrant owning one but there is enough collective need in the area. Then, as the comfort level with frozen semen grows and more people opt to use it, they can justify the purchase of a tank for the clinic.

Horse owners expect a great deal from their horses these days and frozen semen can help stallions meet their show and breeding commitments, which translates to stallion owners that are successful in both endeavors. It can also ease the mare owners' anxiety over whether or not semen is going to arrive in time to inseminate the mare that is ready to breed. Advances in products and procedures have made frozen semen a win-win situation for mare and stallion owners alike.