

The Foal

The Cost of Breeding a Friesian Foal

By Charlotte Dumford

Every year you wait, breathless with anticipation, camped out in the barn or with eyes glued to a foal cam, watching your heavily pregnant Friesian mare while she sleeps peacefully and occasionally waddles around looking for leftover slips of hay. When your mare finally delivers your long-awaited Friesian foal, chances are you are sleepless with excitement, completely focused on that precious newborn and lost in the wonder of new life. For most of us, this miracle never gets old no matter how many times we experience it! Eventually, however, we are called on to attach real numbers to this priceless experience. Just how much does it cost to breed a Friesian foal? Determining this cost is a complicated equation that goes beyond the stud fee and a couple of visits to the veterinarian. When planning to breed your mare, it's wise to consider all of these variables as you set your budget.

GETTING STARTED

The financial outlay starts well before the actual breeding takes place. The first significant expense will be your stud fee. The cost of this budget item will vary depending on which stallion you choose and whether you choose to use fresh or frozen semen. The cost for using fresh semen should be well-detailed in your breeding contract. The fee for frozen semen may be more complicated. If you buy frozen semen from a broker, you will find that some charge by the dose and require that you pay a stud fee later for each pregnancy, while others sell in multiple dose "breedings" which already include the stud fee. Be aware that if you purchase your frozen semen well in advance of breeding, your veterinarian or facility may charge for storage and maintenance either seasonally or monthly.

Most equine veterinarians, whether they be your local country vet or a board-certified theriogenologist, will recommend a breeding soundness exam for your mare prior to any breeding attempts. This normally includes a culture and cytology to determine the state of the uterine environment before you insert any costly semen. If these test results come back less than stellar, you can then take action to ensure that your mare's uterus is a hospitable place for an embryo to land. While these tests certainly add to your cost up front, they can save you time, frustration, and money in the long run.

Some other costs of getting started include updating your mare's vaccinations and dental work, plus an initial ultrasound to begin tracking your mare's cycles.

PROCESS OF BREEDING

When your mare begins her cycle, you can fill in more budget lines. You may be lucky enough to have a veterinarian willing to come to your farm for the breeding process. This is convenient and a timesaver for you; however, your vet will charge for the farm call each time he comes to ultrasound and inseminate your mare. On the plus side, you will likely save on mare care. If you must take your mare to your vet's facility, you can add transport costs plus board to your budget. Some vets and facilities may certainly charge an



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all-inclusive fee for the entire breeding process. In my experience, equine reproduction vets most commonly charge line item by line item for each service they perform. During your mare's cycle, your vet will palpate and ultrasound more frequently to check a follicle development. Your vet may also employ a variety of drugs from sedatives to ovulatory agents such as deslorelin or HcG.

At this point, the stallion enters the equation again. If you are using frozen semen, your mare's "date" should already be on site, waiting in the container. If you are using fresh cooled semen, you need to order your semen, which adds fees for collecting the stallion and for expedited shipping.

The next part of the process is the actual insemination. Fresh semen can be injected into the body of the uterus using a syringe and flexible plastic tubing. When using frozen semen, which typically features lower motility and a shorter time window of viability, most experienced veterinarians prefer to increase their chances of success by performing deep horn insemination. This more technically difficult process, needless to say, is more costly.

So, the mare has been inseminated! Can we draw a line under the actual breeding process and tally it up now? Not so fast! Since your semen, whether fresh cooled or frozen, can be somewhat caustic to your mare's uterus, a conscientious vet will wait a day post-insemination to check your mare for negative reactions such as inflammation with fluid. If this occurs, your mare may require one or more injections of oxytocin, or even uterine lavage, to clear this. Remember, a hostile uterine environment is counterproductive to your pregnancy goal and thus more costly in the long run!

PREGNANCY CHECKS

Flash forward 14-16 days. (Let's admit it, there's nothing "flash" about it. The wait seems slower than Christmas!) Now comes the moment of truth: the pregnancy ultrasound. For most Friesian breeders, there is nothing more exciting (except the birth itself!) than seeing that precious black dot on the ultrasound screen for the first time. All of your hopes, dreams, and plans take the first step into reality right there. The next step is the heart beat check around 28-30 days. If both these checks yield positive results, you have cleared the first major hurdle and are on your way to a return on your investment, both financially and emotionally. On the other hand, if either of these checks reveal an empty uterus, it is a unique and almost indescribable disappointment. Hopes, dreams, and an already significant investment down the drain. What now?

TRY, TRY AGAIN! \$\$\$ REPEAT X ?

CARE OF THE PREGNANT MARE

Friesian breeders tend to be a passionate, perhaps stubborn, bunch, and deep desire and persistence eventually pay off in a pregnancy. So take a deep breath and settle down for the next 10 months or so? I'm sure somewhere (perhaps in the Netherlands) someone must experience a "best case scenario" in Friesian breeding. But I've never personally met them or heard about them, much less experienced such a thing. Even in a best-case scenario, however, you must still factor in routine basic mare care and maintenance costs such as feed, farrier, etc. (roughly \$4500 per year for me). Add to that some pregnancy-specific costs such as pregnancy Rhino shots at 5, 7 and 9 months and pre-foaling vaccinations.

Furthermore, you should keep possible pregnancy complications in the back of your mind. Some mares may require 15 ml daily doses of Regumate (\$254.95 per 1000ml bottle) to maintain the pregnancy. Your vet may also advise periodic pregnancy checks depending on your mare's history. In the last 17 years, I've had two mares develop placentitis, one at 7 months and one at 9 months. Both required treatment averaging \$500 each to remain pregnant and deliver healthy foals. Another, more serious, complication involved a foal malpresentation at 295 days gestation which threatened premature delivery. Fortunately,



Photo courtesy Angie DePuydt

with quick intervention and a long hospitalization, this extreme situation had a positive ending - a live foal! - but cost thousands to achieve.

FOALING TIME

In the weeks prior to your mare's due date, there are always some additional expenses. You will certainly want to prepare a basic foaling kit, and you may even need to upgrade or repair your mare's stall or construct a dedicated foaling area. And how will you conduct your foal watch? Doubtless, many of us still prefer to do it the old-fashioned way by camping out in the barn; however, technology offers some options for those of us who prefer to conduct foal watch continuously, even from remote locations such as the feed store, the dentist, or even our beds. Suitable stall cameras can be found in a wide variety of price ranges, some quite inexpensive. Stall cameras are likely a good investment if you plan to breed regularly.

On a more serious note, one essential expense prior to foaling is NI testing. FHANA has a wealth of detailed educational material on NI (neonatal isoerythrolysis), far beyond the scope of this article on breeding costs, already in its archives. But I do want to emphasize the necessity of reviewing those materials and preparing yourself and, more importantly, your mare and foal, by testing. This is another one of those expenses that can save you a great deal of stress and heartbreak in the long run. Currently, the cost of NI testing, including your own vet's charges for the farm call and blood draw, averages \$90-\$100. With these results you can

budget for and plan to manage your foal's birth and first few days of life successfully.

After what sometimes seems like an endless wait, your mare will, believe it or not, finally deliver her foal! This is IT...the joyful fulfillment of a breeder's Friesian dreams. If all is going according to the "book," normal expenses for this phase of your breeding adventure will include a neonatal exam with an IgG test to determine if your foal has received an adequate passive transfer of immunity from your mare's colostrum. Some vets may routinely suggest a tetanus shot and an enema for your newborn as well as a basic postpartum examination of your mare. Other routine costs associated with all Friesian births include FHANA registration fees (currently \$275 for foals sired by stallions residing in North America, or \$300 for foals sired by a stallion residing outside North America); a vet visit to insert your foal's microchip and pull DNA samples; plus, unless your foal is free based on lineage, genetic tests to determine your foal's carrier status for hydrocephalus or dwarfism.

As with any great adventure, however, most experienced Friesian breeders can tell you that Friesian births quite frequently do not follow the textbook plan. What if your foal's IgG test reveals failure of passive transfer of immunity, for example? This is a serious situation that requires a plasma transfusion. Some vets can sedate and treat your foal on farm, but if not, you will need to transport both mare and foal to the nearest

BREEDING WITH FRESH COOLED SEMEN (U.S.)

Info. provided by Angie DePuydt/Riverchase Friesians

Breeding the Mare	Cost
Stud Fee	\$1,500.00
Semen Collection/Shipping Fee	\$275.00
Veterinarian fees for breeding	\$390.00
Pregnancy Checks/Ultrasounds (farm calls, 14 and 35 day checks)	\$228.00
Vaccinations needed during pregnancy (farm calls, vaccinations)	\$336.00
NI Testing (farm call, blood draw test)	\$90.00
Foal	
Newborn Foal Check (farm call, exam, ultrasound)	\$160.00
Foal Umbilical Infection (farm call, exam, ultrasound)	\$160.00
KFPS Registration	\$275.00
Microchipping (farm call, sedation, chip)	\$178.00
Genetic Testing (Hydrocephalus, Dwarfism)	\$60.00
Keuring Fees (facility, runner, stall, etc)	\$150.00
Farrier - Hoof Trims	\$80.00
Subtotal	\$3,807.00
Mare - Yearly Maintenance	
Medical/Mortality Insurance	\$1,024.00
Feed	\$987.00
Hay	\$750.00
Farrier	\$320.00
Routine Veterinary Care (Dental, Vaccinations, etc.)	\$250.00
Subtotal	\$3,326.00
TOTAL	\$7,138.00

*fees vary based on location, veterinary fees, mare's cycle, etc.

BREEDING WITH FROZEN SEMEN (US)

Info. provided by Charlotte Dumford/Rose Hill Friesians

This table shows the cost of hauling a mare to the veterinarian's facility for breeding with a single dose of frozen semen. It does not reflect any costs accruing thereafter.

Prebreeding Expenses		Cost
Vaccinations		\$125.00
Uterine Culture/Cytology		\$120.00
Dental (Routine Float)		\$100.00
Farm Call		\$75.00
SUBTOTAL		\$420.00
UNCOMPLICATED BREEDING-FROZEN SEMEN		
**Frozen semen - 1 insemin. dose		\$695.00
Mare Care/Board (wet mare)-6 days,\$26/day		\$130.00
(6) Ultrasounds (check follicle)		\$228.00
Ovulation Induction (deslorelin)		\$58.50
Sedation		\$30.50
Insemination (deep horn)		\$95.00
Oxytocin injections post insemin. (3)		\$21.00
Ultrasound - (2) Pregnancy Checks (14 and 30 days)		\$76.00
SUBTOTAL		\$1,334.00
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$1,754.00

**Based on doses purchased, shipping, handling, storage fees, etc.

Fees vary based on location, veterinarian fees, mare's cycle, etc.



Photos:
Left - Sue Fulton©
Right & Far Right -
John Dumford©



BREEDING COSTS WITH FRESH, COOLED SEMEN IN CANADA

Info. provided by Allison Thomas/Mythic Friesians

	Breeding an "Easy Mare"		Breeding a "More Difficult Mare"	
	Cost-CAD	Cost - USD	Cost - CAD	Cost - USD
Stud Fee (prebreeding)	\$1,954.00	\$1,500.00	\$1,954.00	\$1,500.00
Hospital Board- \$17/day	\$170.00		\$136.00	
Breeding Package	\$450.00		\$450.00	
Uterine Culture/Sensitivity			\$95.00	
Uterine Treatment-Acetylcystine x 4			\$114.25	
Uterine Treatment-Antibiotic x 3			\$95.00	
Oxytocin Injections, \$2.50/dose	\$7.50		\$10.00	
Ovulation induction (deslorelin)	\$15.00		\$15.00	
Flunixin			\$6.63	
Caslick's Procedure	\$115.00		\$115.00	
Ultrasound	\$59.50		\$59.50	
Altrenogest (Regumate)	\$279.86		\$377.00	
SUBTOTAL	\$3052.86		\$3,430.38	
Additional Fees				
Shipping and collection	\$586-650.00	\$450-500.00	\$586-650.00	\$450-500.00
CFIA Import Permit/year/owner	\$60.00		\$60.00	
Border Fees-first shipment/season	\$150-200.00		\$150-200.00	
Border Fees-repeat breeding/season	\$60.00		\$60.00	
TOTAL APPROXIMATE COST	\$3,962.86		\$4,400.48	

*Fees vary based on location, veterinary fees, mare's cycle, etc.

"More Difficult Mare" - these numbers reflect 2 cultures and treatment of uterine infection. This breeding did result in a pregnancy; HOWEVER the pregnancy was lost by 50 days gestation.

vet hospital to perform a transfusion. And what about your mare? Most Friesian breeders are all-too-aware that Friesian mares have an increased tendency to retain their placentas. Since this can also cause serious illness, as well as possibly impact future fertility, you will need to treat this quickly. This may be resolved with little fuss by one or more injections of oxytocin, or it may require uterine lavage performed by your vet.

Realistically, a breeder can occasionally experience more serious complications with a foal including umbilical hernias or patent urachus, both requiring surgery, limb conditions such as contracted tendons or being windswept, or even sepsis, all of which may require hospitalization and/or protracted courses of treatment, all of which WILL take a significant bite out of your budget.

BREEDING IS NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART

I imagine by now, if you are still reading this article, you may be a bit rattled by "sticker shock" and exhausted by the long list of "what ifs." You should certainly have a finer appreciation of why Friesian foals cost what they do. When you examine the true cost of breeding, which must also include the intangible costs such as your time, frustration, and worry, you can only reach one basic conclusion: breeding Friesians is not only a business venture, but a labor of love. It takes strong business acumen, firm resolve, tireless dedication, and a stout heart. In short, the trials may multiply, the cost may be high, but with realistic budget expectations and a persistent spirit, you can turn your blood, sweat, and tears into a sound business. And beyond monetary profit, there are certain sure rewards that cannot be quantified. You become part of a rarefied group of passionate people worldwide, all adding to the legacy and contributing to the future of the Friesian horse.

