

South Island Foster Foal Service

Guidelines & Best Practice

New Zealand Thoroughbred Breeders Association

SIFFS Contact: Anna Miles **021 0250 3472** sifosterfoalservice@gmail.com

Text preferred — please include your name, number, location, and details of your mare or foal

About the South Island Foster Foal Service

The South Island Foster Foal Service (SIFFS) is a free service, available to all breeds of horses and ponies in the South Island of New Zealand. It is run entirely on volunteer time and effort.

SIFFS is operated under the umbrella of the New Zealand Thoroughbred Breeders Association (NZTBA), which acts solely as a facilitator. The NZTBA, its branches, and its members take no responsibility for issues arising beyond the initial introduction of potential interested parties.

Our primary role is to maintain a database of available foster mares and orphaned foals, and to connect mare owners with foal owners as quickly as possible. Fostering is always the best outcome for an orphaned foal, and rearing a foal also provides comfort and purpose for a grieving mare — we work hard to make this happen.

The North Island service is operated separately. North Island contact: Roy & Derval Latimer — 021 4 A FOAL (021 423 625).

Contacting SIFFS

Text is the preferred method of contact. Please send a text message to 021 0250 3472 including the following information:

For all contacts:

- Your full name and mobile number
- Your location (farm/town)
- Whether you are offering a foster mare or requiring one

If you are offering a foster mare:

- Breed and age of the mare
- Why and when she lost her own foal
- Whether she is a maiden or experienced foster mare

If you are requiring a foster mare:

- Breed and age of the foal
- The foal's strength and general health
- Whether the foal suffered any trauma during labour
- Has the foal drunk colostrum from its own dam? When?

It is also helpful to know:

- What facilities you have
- Your level of experience with foals and foster situations
- Whether you are willing for your mare or foal to travel to an appropriate facility if necessary

Please note: *SIFFS is a volunteer-run service. We will respond as soon as possible, but please be patient if there is a short delay.*

Colostrum — A Critical Priority

One of the first questions SIFFS will ask when you contact us about an orphaned foal is whether the foal has received colostrum.

Foals must receive good quality colostrum within the first 24 hours of life. The optimal window is within the first 12 hours. This is because a foal's intestines can only absorb the vital antibodies contained in colostrum during this short period. After approximately 24 hours, this ability closes permanently.

If a foal has not received adequate colostrum, please contact your veterinarian immediately. Colostrum supplementation or intravenous plasma therapy may be required.

When No Foster Mare is Available

When a suitable foster mare cannot be found, SIFFS and veterinarians will always recommend raising the foal on a quality Mare Milk Replacer combined with a specialist orphan foal hard feed mix.

These products are formulated to provide the correct ratio of fats, sugars, and proteins that a growing foal requires, and give the foal's digestive system the best chance of avoiding upsets.

Important: Whole cow's milk is not recommended. Research shows it is too high in fat and too low in sugar compared to mare's milk, placing the foal's digestive system at significant risk of upset.

If you need to substitute feed a foal, please speak with your vet or a specialist equine vet about what to feed and how frequently. Continue to stay in contact with SIFFS — we will keep working to find a suitable mare.

Appropriate Use of Foster Mares

Appropriate circumstances

The use of a foster mare is appropriate when:

- A mare has died during or shortly after foaling
- A mare has suffered an injury or illness and cannot adequately care for her foal
- A mare has undergone a major veterinary procedure (such as colic surgery) and cannot cope with nursing

Inappropriate circumstances

The use of a foster mare is NOT appropriate when:

- A mare will not conceive while nursing a foal and the owner wishes to rebreed
- The owner of a performance mare wishes the mare to return to or remain in competition
- A mare demonstrates a compulsive disorder (such as windsucking) and the owner does not wish to risk the foal developing the habit
- An older mare is unable to raise a foal to optimum condition
- The mare is to travel overseas for breeding or other reasons and the owner wishes to manage the foal at home

Note: It is never acceptable to euthanise a foal in order to use its mother to foster another foal considered to be of greater value.

Care Guidelines

The following guidelines apply to all parties involved in a foster foal arrangement. The aim is to ensure the health and welfare of both the foster mare and the orphaned foal throughout the fostering period.

Health & Welfare

1. The health, welfare, and respectful treatment of all animals must remain the highest priority at all times.
2. The best possible veterinary care must be provided to maintain animal health and welfare.
3. Ready access to appropriate food and water must be provided at all times for a lactating mare and rapidly growing foal.
4. Freedom of movement to exercise, stand, stretch, and lie down must be provided.
5. Accommodation must protect from the elements and must not cause harm.
6. Regular hoof care and dental care must be maintained.
7. Regular parasite control measures must be maintained.
8. Any illness or injury must be identified and treated promptly. The owner must be immediately informed and kept up to date with treatment progress.
9. In the event euthanasia is the only course of action, every attempt must be made to contact the owner first. The procedure must be performed humanely by a veterinarian, who may also authorise humane destruction if the owner cannot be reached.
- In the event of the death of the foster foal, it is the responsibility of the foal owner to monitor the mare for mastitis and to arrange the return of the mare to the mare owner at the foal owner's cost.

Unsuccessful Fostering

- In the event of an unsuccessful fostering, the foal owner is responsible for paying the costs of any drugs and veterinary attention that directly relate to the fostering attempt.
- Foal owners are not responsible for veterinary costs associated with the mare and usual post-foaling protocols — these remain the responsibility of the mare owner.
- If the fostering is unsuccessful, the foal owner is responsible for arranging the return of the mare and meeting all associated transport costs. The mare must be returned to her owner in a timely manner.

Transport

Any transport of the mare or foal must comply with the New Zealand Code of Welfare for the Transport of Animals. Please consult your veterinarian or the MPI website for current requirements.

Insurance & Records

10. It is strongly recommended that both the foster mare and the foal are insured for the duration of the fostering arrangement.
11. Body condition of both the mare and foal should be monitored regularly and reported to the respective owners — photographs are a useful record between visits.

Returning the Mare

12. The date for returning the mare to the owner or agent, should be agreed in advance.
13. Where possible, the foal should be weaned prior to the mare's return.
14. The mare should be monitored for mastitis before she is transported home.
15. The broodmare owner's wishes regarding getting the mare back in foal should be discussed promptly and acted on diligently.
16. Foster mares should be returned in the same or better condition than when received — feet trimmed, dewormed, and in good body condition.

The willingness of mare owners to lend their animals is the foundation of this service. Returning mares in excellent condition is the best way to ensure owners continue to participate — and that the service remains available for all breeders who need it.

Responsibilities of All Parties

Foal owner's responsibilities

- Contact SIFFS as soon as possible after the need arises.
- Communicate directly with the foster mare owner or their agent, and with your veterinarian.
- Take responsibility for regularly monitoring the foster mare and orphaned foal throughout the fostering period.
- If you manage to source a mare or find a solution independently, notify SIFFS immediately so volunteer time is not spent unnecessarily on your case.
- Keep SIFFS informed of outcomes — this information helps the service improve.

Mare owner's responsibilities

- Ensure your mare is healthy and suitable for fostering before offering her to the service.
- Communicate any known health concerns, behavioural traits, or special requirements to the foal owner.
- Stay in regular contact with the foal owner throughout the fostering period.
- Discuss your wishes regarding rebreeding clearly and early.

SIFFS responsibilities

- Maintain an up-to-date register of available mares and orphaned foals.
- Connect parties as quickly as possible.
- Provide general guidance on fostering procedures and feeding alternatives when no mare is available.
- Act as facilitator only — SIFFS and the NZTBA accept no liability beyond the initial introduction of parties.

The success of this service depends on cooperation between veterinarians, the owners of orphaned foals, and the generous owners of foster mares.

The NZTBA warmly thanks all mare owners who support this service each season.