

Pro Tips from Iron Spring Farm for Selling Your Foal

Compiled and edited by Christine DeHerrera

Selling foals can be an exciting and profitable endeavor. In this article, Meghan deGaray, Iron Spring Farm breeding manager, and Quintten Alston, Iron Spring Farm sales manager, share the strategies used at Iron Spring Farm, as well the techniques they've used to market their own youngsters.

When is the best time to start marketing your foal?

Immediately after he's born. Once he's up and you know he and his dam are healthy, share some cute photos and video with your friends on social media. True marketing won't begin until he's a little older and ready to be seen in a bigger way, but letting your friends and colleagues know about your bundle of joy sets the stage for his sale.

Quinnten's Pro Tip

Fresh videos and photos from foaling probably generate our highest rate of interaction on social media, so it is a good place to start to build an image for your new foal.

Meghan's Pro Tip

It is easier and more profitable to sell foals when they are a little on the younger side and still look very cute. As they grow, they can get gawky and can go through growth spurts that make the croup high, etc. It gets more difficult to sell them as they close in on their first birthday, so get started early.

How is the foal market in North America?

It continues to grow. In Europe there is a very good market for both top quality dressage and jumper foals. The dealers and the big stallion owners tend to buy a lot of the good foals to develop and then sell later on.

In North America dressage foals are a little easier to sell than jumper foals since movement is the key for dressage buyers and that can be seen at a young age. Over here, many professional jumper riders wait until they can ride the horses and see how they jump, but there's definitely still a market for jumper foals.

Meghan's Pro Tip

Foals are bought by both professionals and serious amateurs who like to develop their own horses. They like to have young horses in their pipelines for the future. By investing in foals, these riders can get several prospects to raise and bring along. Some big-name riders have sponsors who like to buy foals. The sponsors enjoy the challenge of trying to pick out future stars.

Quinnten's Pro Tip

Amateurs, professionals and everyone in between buy foals. This is where social media can really help you understand the market. Take the time to do your research. I know who amongst my friends are foal buyers, who are riding horse buyers, who are breeders, who are professionals, etc. When we have a suitable horse, we can let the right people know about him.

What's the key to foal photos and videos that sell?

The money shot is the trot. To learn what works, watch videos from the foal auctions and other well-known and successful foal sellers to see how they do their videos and photos. Short, good quality footage is better than too much footage.

Quinnten's Pro Tip

Based on what has generated the most inquiry volume for us, the biggest component of selling a foal is good video of the trot. I have had foals who could "video trot" at eight days old, and others who were not quite ready until one month of age.

You will also need headshots, conformation, trot and canter photos. Video of movement in all three gaits is necessary, but the simple trot video is a great way to draw interest. (Be ready to supply additional footage.) You will also want video of conformation and close-ups of the head. My preference is video from a high-quality camcorder, though we have had success with iPhone video.

Meghan's Pro Tip

The canter is the most difficult gait to get because foals tend to want to gallop around like maniacs instead of a nice, relaxed canter where the buyers can see the true gait. The walk is also important to show and for that you might need to lead the foal. Also, don't run the foal around in a large area. He will get tired quickly and you won't get quality footage.

Why is getting great photos and video so hard?

Capturing the right moment usually takes years of honing that skill. Don't be afraid to invest in a good photographer/videographer.

Even when you hire a professional, do your part by focusing on the details of the setting and the grooming. Make sure the area you are filming looks professional and tidy. Cut the grass or drag the arena. Clear the area of any debris, broken fences or anything that looks unkempt. Make sure your mare and foal look their best.

Quinnten's Pro Tip

Do not settle for mediocre photos or video. Foals that are presented well with quality photos and video will always have a market. With a good photographer, you can make most horses look attractive. To get those winning shots, you need patience and helpers. The setting of your photos and video is everything! In the same breath, lighting!

Meghan's Pro Tip

On the day of the shoot, make sure your mare and foal are looking their best. Sunburnt coats are okay, but have them thoroughly groomed, including trimming mama's mane.

Do I have to be on Facebook to sell my foals?

Nope. But, social media, especially Facebook, even with all its challenges, is a wonderfully effective way to showcase your youngsters.

Meghan's Pro Tip

People love to look at foal pictures and you can reach a lot of people all over the world quickly through Facebook. In addition, a lot of our clients have good success placing their foals for sale on the Iron Spring Farm client sales page. (There is no charge for any offspring by our stallions.) The breed association classifieds also seem to do well.

Quinnten's Pro Tip

Facebook is my go-to. Both personal Facebook pages and business Facebook pages. For my personal foals, we also use Instagram, but not as deliberately. Foal inquiries from that platform have been minimal for us. We have also had success with Warmblood-sales.com, but have rarely actively used sales websites.

How important is it to network with other breeders?

It's important. Developing relationships with other breeders, and riders and trainers will expand your business in ways you can't even imagine. In non-covid years, attending keurings, breed shows, horse shows and other events is a wonderful way to meet your colleagues and find your community. It's very easy to break the ice with breeders: tell me about your horses.

Quinnten's Pro Tip

Watch other breeders to see what is selling, what is not selling and HOW they are selling. I have a lot of breeder friends who I can discuss potential stallion choices with. Often there will be someone else who has used a stallion we are considering, and they can comment on what that stallion brought to the table, whether they were marketable for sales, etc. Often other breeders might know of a buyer who is in the market that they can send your way because they don't have what they are looking for themselves.

Meghan's Pro Tip

I find social media also really facilitates networking—it's easy to share ideas and brainstorm. There are several good equine marketing groups on Facebook, so just spend some time there and you'll find many valuable resources.

Selling foals can be a vital part of your business. Learn the ropes, build a community and watch your youngsters find great new homes.

This article originally appeared in the Iron Spring Farm monthly newsletter. Subscribe for free at ironspringfarm.com