

You can take it to the bank

Weaning your way to better profits

As a breeder you are faced daily with nutrition options for your breeding dogs which naturally leads to how to help mom and the pups when it comes time to wean. Generally speaking nature and mom have this pretty well figured out as mothers milk contains most of what the pups need. Their milk contains nearly double the amount of protein and fat when compared with either goat or cow. This difference reflects the fact that they are carnivorous and the need for a diet that is higher in these nutrients when compared with other animals. Even in spite of evolution we still wonder if there is a point where we should give assistance? How and when to introduce whole foods and the best ways to achieve timely, successful weaning? How long to allow mom to nurse? These are questions that are observed “ on the ground and most of them are answered by nature but..... lets just dive in anyway.

Breeders mostly agree that 3 to 4 weeks after birth normally the mother will slowly begin to discourage nursing. At this time the puppies will also naturally begin to show a reduction in length of nursing and more time is spent getting into messes. So at this point the practice of offering food and increased handling are expected to improve the puppy's development. Around 4 weeks they have their eyes open and are more mobile and their digestive systems are able to deal with the introduction of new foods. Once the pups are no longer nursing it is good practice to begin adding some basic supplements to their diet. There are certain times in life when pups are particularly vulnerable to infections and diseases. One of these times is during the first few months of life, when their immune systems are not fully developed. Newborn pups receive colostrum, which is rich in bioactive compounds and peptide-based nutrients, including growth factors, immunoglobulins, and other immune factors that can neutralize viruses and inhibit colonization of the gut and production of biological toxins by harmful microorganisms. By introducing small dosages of system building blocks such as prebiotics to support intestinal balance, you are able to reduce such things as stress due to weaning, worming and vaccinations. Gently supporting the digestive system leads to clearly significant beneficial effects on the puppy immune system responses. Also, the impact of prebiotics on fecal quality shows that both the utilization of nutrients and improved protection against pathogens through promoting the growth of gastrointestinal bacteria, such as bifidobacteria leads to better immune response.

As with many transitions in a dogs life, the transition from mother's milk to solid foods can present a problem or two, the most common being food refusal and diarrhea. Food refusal can be very concerning to the breeder or pet owner. It is difficult to see puppies not make the progression to healthy eating. A liquid diet is necessary to gradually prepare puppies for solid food. A gruel can be prepared in any number of ways – adding liquid to solid kibble being the most common. Put any of these mixtures in small shallow weighted dish. Some of the pups will catch on immediately and some will not so they may need a little encouragement such as a prebiotic on the food to enhance the aroma. You will gradually increase the amount and degree

of solids day by day until they become fully acclimated to their new experience. Adding a taste enhancer, especially fermented products, can entice puppies to belly up to the dish and dive in. Preparing the puppies intestinal system with positive bacteria from a prebiotic, and continuing treatment until shipment can often prevent diarrhea problems caused by the undeveloped digestive system.

Puppies eat anywhere from 5-10 % of their daily body weight. This varies with breed, rate of growth and growth stages. The puppies' growth weight should be monitored. Most puppies will double their birth weight in the first seven to eight days. A good visual clue is the amount of fat covering the rib cage. The ribs should be prominent but should still be easily felt when you run your hands over them.

Keep in mind that their entire environment, diet, proper exercise and socialization has an impact on their overall health. Of course you will encounter all kinds of health issues but we will save that for another day. Healthy well-adjusted pups lead to happy well-adjusted breeders.