

Kentucky Alternative Livestock Association (KALA)

Fawn Care

By Chance Groves

Starting fawns out well is critical. No matter how you choose to raise your fawns, taking every step you can to start them on the right path will pay huge dividends later. As previously mentioned, fawn raising likely has the biggest variety amongst farmers of any specific area of deer farming. Some choose to bottle feed everyone, while others choose to only bottle feed those that aren't cared for by their mothers. There is no one way that is right: you must choose what is right for you and your individual circumstances. And in addition to that, what you select this season doesn't have to be what you always do. Our ability to adapt from learned experience allows us to continue progressing our farms to maximize benefits. Please remember that the things mentioned here are good standards of practice, but not requirements. Follow your intuition, seek guidance from other deer farmers, and consult with your veterinarian.

Interaction can begin with a fawn within a few hours after birth. You want to give the doe enough time to clean the fawn off and deliver her placenta before entering into the pen in order to reduce stress on the doe. It is important to place some type of identification on the fawn early on, as it is likely that others will be born within short order. This will make it simpler for pedigree tracking later. Some farms will use a hospital bracelet around the neck, use a small metal sheep tag, or use a marker to write in the ear of the fawn. These options are only temporary until the flop tag can be placed. Other farms will go ahead and immediately place the flop tag. During that initial interaction, it is also best practice to spray the umbilical cord and hooves with a solution of iodine to reduce the risk for infection. A small amount of probiotic paste can also be given orally at this point while still in the field to encourage healthy bacteria in the stomach. Always be mindful of where the mother is while you are engaged in these activities, as most does are very protective of their fawns.

If you are planning to bottle feed, it is a good idea to leave the fawn in the field with the mother for approximately the first 24 hours of life. This allows the fawn to get critical nutrients from the colostrum in the mother's milk that will encourage a healthy immune system. There could be situations where it would cause more harm than good to leave the fawn out to that time frame such as mother abandonment or severe storms; however, these are rare. If you have to remove a fawn before you feel certain that they have received the colostrum, you can give a synthetic colostrum by bottle.

Beginning as early as 12 hours after birth, initial vaccinations can be done. Be sure to consult with your veterinarian for guidance on what should be given. One example of day one vaccinations is the following: Bo-se, bovine e-colizer, and additional probiotic paste. Vaccinations can be given by holding the fawn securely or by placing the fawn into a fawn cradle to minimize movement. Regardless of how you administer these, speed and efficiency will be beneficial to you. It reduces stress on the fawn and reduces the risk of injury. If you haven't already tagged with a flop tag, now would be a good time to do so.

At this point, you must make the decision on whether you want to bottle feed the fawn or leave it to nurse with its mother. There are benefits to both ways of management, but this is a decision that you must make depending on a great number of factors unique to your farm. Bottle feeding is very time intensive and can get costly; however, it can allow for you to catch health challenges earlier and can lead to calmer deer because of the constant interaction you have with them. Allowing fawns to nurse from their mothers allows nature to take its course and get all the health benefits that come from natural milk. Again, there is no one way that is right. Some farms bottle feed all fawns, some bottle feed only doe fawns, while others only will bottle feed those that are frail or are abandoned by their mothers.

From this point forward in this guide, we will assume that you have chosen to bottle feed. Before getting into the specifics about bottle feeding, there are a couple of other areas we should address. First, you should have stalls set up in which to place the fawns. These stalls should not have open wire or large gaps in them, as these types of things would be an invitation for injury. Line them with pine shavings or straw to create some soft bedding. Be sure to have some sort of top on your stalls as eventually the fawns will begin jumping and will be able to come over the top of the stall because of their powerful legs. This can create injuries that are life threatening. Doe fawns can be placed in the same stall together, depending on the size of your stalls. Buck fawns should be in stalls alone. The other area that needs to be decided at this point is what type of milk you plan to use. There are several powdered formulas out there that can be mixed with water and heated. Another option is to use whole milk that is mixed with eggs and a small portion of the formula (optional). Some farms even raise goats that are milked to nourish the fawns. There are varying costs associated with these choices.

As mentioned earlier, it is a time intensive process. For the first 30 days of bottle feeding, feedings should occur at a minimum of three times per day. You can evenly space the feedings based upon the schedule that works best for you. Be mindful of the fact that this is a schedule that must be maintained as closely as possible to ensure the fawns are getting the proper nutrition at the right time. Because the fawns have small stomachs, they are only going to eat a few ounces at a time, which means they are going to have to eat more often. This may even be more often than three times daily depending on the fawn's health. If the fawn is frail, it may need smaller feedings more frequently. Fawns may not eat very much, if at all, during the first feeding or two after being pulled from their mother. It is likely that they have nursed and have a fully belly and don't want the bottle. By the beginning of the second day after being

brought into the handling facility, they will likely start eating well. Initially, you will start with feeding three to four ounces at a time. As the fawn begins to grow more, you can increase the amount being fed slowly. After the fawn is approximately a week old, you will want to introduce some dirt into their diet. This dirt will need to be free from pesticides and rocks. The dirt allows them to gain minerals that they crave. Around this same time, you can also give them water. By about two weeks, you can begin introducing feed to them. Fawns, and deer in general, will only eat what they need. Don't be alarmed if they pick through their feed mixture. Between weeks three and four, you can also begin introducing grass into their diet.

When you are bottle feeding, it is also necessary for you to stimulate the fawn to urinate and defecate in their first couple of weeks of life. In nature, the does will do this by licking the fawn. It is a simple enough process to stimulate them with baby wipes or paper towels, which mimic the mother's action. You can expect to see runny stool and even some bloody stool at times, as it does not become pellet-like until they are at least a few weeks old. This may mean a variety of things, including but not limited to, the formula being too rich or stimulating too often. A short course of Corid and Baytril will resolve these issues quickly: check with your veterinarian for the best way to treat these challenges. Usually between weeks two and three fawns will begin to urinate and defecate on their own, so this is no longer necessary. Be sure that you are cleaning out stalls daily or as needed and replacing bedding to keep a clean environment.

Feedings can be reduced to twice daily on days 31-60, assuming that things are progressing well. During this time, you will see that feed and grass intake will also increase. Always remember that hungry fawns are healthy fawns. You should still be incrementally increasing the amount of milk that is being given during this time as well. Ultimately, you will top out at 18-20 ounces per feeding (depending on the maximum amount your bottles will hold). As you near the 60-day mark, you may begin to see the fawn decreasing the amount of milk they are taking at each feeding. At this same time, you will notice that their feed and grass intake is increasing. This is natural, as they are preparing for the weaning process. It is also during this time frame that if you want to allow your fawns to have time to go outside to run and play in a small run for brief periods during the day, it will allow them to release the seemingly endless amount of energy they are displaying at this age.

Booster shots should be given at or near the 60-day mark. These might include CD&T and a multi-bacterial medication that treats fusobacterium, EHD, and E-coli that your veterinarian can prescribe. This would also be a good time to put in the state tag. By this point in time, fawns are more likely to survive into maturity and it is a safer point to place that tag. Prior to that, most farmers don't put in that tag because they are expensive and don't want to waste it should the fawn not survive.

At day 61, feedings are reduced to once daily, again assuming that things are progressing well. The one bottle a day is usually done at bedtime. By this time, fawns are decreasing their dependence on milk and increasing the amount of feed and grass in their diets.

On day 75, fawns are ready to graduate from the fawn room to move outside. Prior to putting them outside, they should receive their last booster shots, which include second doses of the 60-day medications plus a dose of wormer.

Though most of the intense work is over at the conclusion of bottle feeding, it is still beneficial to be diligent with monitoring the fawns as they are acclimating to being outside. It is helpful if you have a “toddler” pen set up that is surrounded by dense plastic from the ground up to about three feet high. Though this is a costly option to set up, you may find that the benefits outweigh the cost. This will greatly reduce, and hopefully remove, the fawns’ ability to run their legs or head through the fence. If you are introducing fawns in with older deer, watch their interactions closely until they become accustomed to one another. Older deer will attempt to establish dominance and may be aggressive to the fawns and cause injury.

Other tips and suggestions:

- Keep a radio on in the fawn room. This helps to get the fawns used to voices which will help them to be better adjusted to human interaction.
- Keep the lights on in the fawn room during the day and off at night to mimic the natural light cycle.
- Use the two-bowl connected cat or dog dishes for feeding dirt, feed, and grass. They are strong enough plastic to withstand the fawns.
- Pour warm water into the tote or bin you carry the bottles to the fawn room in so the last bottle will be as warm as the first. This is especially helpful if you are feeding a large number. Another option would be to utilize an insulated cooler to pour bottles as needed or to place bottles inside after they have been prepared.
- Keep a feeding chart, documenting how much each fawn eats at each feeding. It will allow you to be certain that everyone is getting fed well and will allow you to pinpoint difficulties early on.

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