

Care of Does Before Kidding

► Proper monitoring and care of goats during parturition, or kidding, is important for the overall health of the goat herd.

Adult dairy goats are generally less commonly affected than young stock by parasitism or respiratory disease, but they are more prone to metabolic and chronic diseases. Most goat dairies use seasonal breeding programs, providing an opportunity to perform routine health maintenance procedures including vaccinations on all animals before the breeding season (either late lactation or dry period).

Due to a large intake of high-energy diets, dairy goats are prone to laminitis (founder). Therefore, routine hoof trimming might be necessary multiple times per year; however, all goats should have their feet inspected and trimmed before the breeding season. All goats intended for breeding should also be evaluated for general soundness, and health conditions (udder changes, chronic lameness, dental problems) that may preclude another successful pregnancy and lactation should be ruled out. While many conditions may be treatable with the help of a veterinarian, culling decisions should be made before breeding. Because herd breeding success largely depends on the abilities of the utilized bucks, a breeding soundness exam (BSE) that evaluates the overall health condition and semen quality should be performed on all bucks approximately 2 to 4 weeks before the breeding season.

Pregnancy can be confirmed either by a blood test or by ultrasound testing. The blood test is typically lower in cost; however, pregnancy confirmation by ultrasound offers the ability to estimate the number of fetuses and can identify abnormal conditions of the uterus that preclude pregnancy. Does that are pregnant with multiple fetuses should be fed additional concentrate in late pregnancy to prevent pregnancy toxemia, a potentially fatal metabolic condition of small ruminants caused by high energy demands that are not met by feed intake (negative energy balance). Pregnancy toxemia can be caused by insufficient or excessive nutritional intake during gestation, and does need to be



fed according to nutritional demands. The increased concentrate feeding during the late gestation (dry period) also prepares the doe for the lactation diet offered following delivery.

Although the general health and parasite burden of goats should be evaluated during all stages of the production cycle, an increased risk for parasitism and other diseases exists during the periparturient period (2 to 4 weeks before and after kidding). The most common health concerns during this time include the following:

- **Pregnancy toxemia** (3 to 6 weeks before kidding)
- **Hypocalcemia** in heavy milking goat lines due to fetal development and onset of milk production (last two weeks of gestation)
- **Increased intestinal parasite burdens;** periparturient parasite rise due to high systemic cortisol (2 weeks before and after kidding)
- **Metritis** (uterine infections within 2 weeks after kidding)
- **Mastitis** (infection of the udder within first weeks after kidding, but possible later in lactation)

Many does produce insufficient amounts of milk or milk with high somatic cell counts well ahead of the next kidding, prompting dry-off before breeding or during the subsequent gestation. However, a dry period of approximately 60 days is recommended for all lactating does. This period allows the animal to regain body condition that was lost during the previous lactation, rests the udder, and allows production of colostrum of good quality. At dry-off, one tube of an intramammary antibiotic (dry cow therapy tubes) is administered per udder half. This treatment treats existing intramammary infections and prevents new infections during the dry-period and the following lactation. Treatment of an intramammary infection is much more successful during the dry period as compared to treatments administered during lactation. Does with a history of chronic mastitis or those that fail to respond to treatment should be culled from the herd.



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