

NEW YORK STATE 4-H DAIRY GOAT PROJECT FACT SHEET #17

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REPRODUCTIVE PROBLEMS OF THE DOE

A variety of health problems may be associated with reproduction in the doe. This fact sheet will cover:

- 1) ketosis
- 2) retained placenta
- 3) milk fever
- 4) genetic infertility
- 5) metritis

Ketosis (acetonemia, pregnancy toxemia). This is a metabolic disease, which means that it is a disturbance in the normal body processes, not something "catching". It is most likely to occur just before kidding or within the two to four weeks after. Does that are extremely overweight or underweight, carrying several kids, or lacking exercise are all susceptible to developing ketosis. A correctly balanced diet during pregnancy and in early lactation, exercise, and no stressful situations are all ways to avoid ketosis in does. Never diet a doe in late pregnancy. Good management can largely control metabolic diseases.

The doe with ketosis loses her appetite, becomes weak and may have muscle spasms. Advanced ketosis results in rapid breathing, frequent urination, coma, and death. Treatment is with oral propylene glycol to raise blood sugar levels. Be sure not to overdose her with propylene glycol as this can cause acidosis.

Milk fever is another metabolic disease. It is poorly named as the doe often has a lower (92-96°F) than normal temperature. Good management can also largely control milk fever. It generally occurs shortly after kidding, and is the result of a calcium imbalance as lactation begins. First signs are listlessness and lack of appetite. Then the doe becomes uncoordinated and goes down. Death can happen quickly after this, so the doe needs help fast. The veterinarian will treat her with intravenous (into the veins) calcium solutions, to raise her blood calcium quickly.

The best control for milk fever is to limit calcium in the feed during pregnancy, then to increase it once lactation begins. The doe needs lots of calcium as soon as she starts producing milk, but not before. High calcium feeds to avoid in late pregnancy are legume hays and soybean and linseed meals. These dietary rules do not apply to yearling does. Yearling does rarely if ever get milk fever. This is because their bodies have a high requirement for calcium throughout their pregnancy due to the fact that they are still growing themselves. To prevent milk fever, it is also best to wait until 24 hours after kidding to milk a heavy producing doe out completely. Instead, milk her just enough to release the pressure on her udder.

Retained placenta can occur after kidding. The afterbirth is not delivered, but remains in the uterus, or partially inside. Do not pull at the exposed parts. Simply clip them off or tie them in a knot and wait. The doe should be started on antibiotics to combat any infections from the afterbirth rotting inside her. You can also get hormone injections from your vet to help her push.

Metritis is a uterine infection that may occur after kidding. The temperature will be high (106-108°F), and immediate and severe antibiotic treatment will be needed. Does with retained placenta or dead kids, or one you had to put your hands in to, are most likely to develop metritis. This is because disease organisms will have had a chance to gain entry in to the uterus. Do not neglect metritis. Serious uterine infections can be fatal or make your doe permanently sterile.

Infertility can have many causes. Goats that never seem to conceive should have their vagina examined with a speculum to make sure it is not abnormally small (infantile) or that the cervix opening does not look infected. Does that come into heat constantly with very short cycles may have cystic ovaries and require hormone treatment.

Suggested Activities

- 1) Invite your veterinarian to talk to your group about some of these reproductive problems and their treatments.
- 2) Make a public presentation or develop an exhibit dealing with reproductive problems.
- 3) Plan out a feed ration for a pregnant goat and for the same doe after kidding.
- 4) Be a quiet observer at a kidding. Be sure to observe what the placenta looks like.