

NEW YORK STATE 4-H MEAT GOAT PROJECT FACT SHEET #8



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HOOF TRIMMING

Wild goats travel long distances looking for food and often play on rough rocks and hard ground. All this activity helps keep their hooves somewhat trimmed and cared for. If their hooves do get too long, the tips usually break off naturally. This makes the goat pretty lame for a few days. Too bad for the goat if it encounters a wolf during these lame days (Bye, bye goat!). Tame or domesticated goats count on you to trim their hooves regularly. Otherwise, their hooves will get too long and they may even become lame from the pain. This may cause them to go off feed and to stop exercising. A wether needs to eat and play a lot to develop a good meat carcass. One of your most important duties as your wether's owner is to regularly trim his hooves. Be warned, the first time you trim his hooves, you will probably get exhausted and it may even seem a little scary. But the more practice you get, the easier it becomes. Plan on trimming your wether's hooves about every 6 weeks. **Remember, the longer you let your goat's hooves get, the harder the job will be.**

Most people use foot rot shears or hoof trimmers to trim goat hooves. You can buy them through livestock supply catalogs and at some feed stores. Pruning shears also work. Pocket knives are pretty dangerous to use since your goat may jump around and you can easily cut yourself. Some people like to use hoof nippers to cut off the tip of the hoof or rasps to file it down. It is generally best for the beginner to invest in shears or trimmers. Even these are very sharp and should be handled with care.

Before you trim your goat, look at the drawings on this page or better yet check out the hooves of a newborn goat kid. See how each hoof of the goat has two toes. The sole of each toe is surrounded by a little wall. This "hoof wall" is what tends to overgrow. You want to trim this wall down until it is level to the sole and parallel to the foot's hairline. The heels of the hoof and the dewclaws (especially on an older goat) may also develop extra tissue that needs to be trimmed off.

The first time you trim your wether's hooves either put him in a milk stand or position him next to a wall. If he is not locked in a milk stand, have a friend hold on to him or tie him up by a leadrope attached to his collar. Start out with the front leg that is farthest from the wall. This way you can brace him against the wall to hold him still if you need to. Facing your goat's tail, lean down and pick up his front leg at the pastern. Bend his knee so the bottom of his hoof is facing up at you. Try not to twist his leg way out to the side. This will push him off balance and he may squirm a lot trying to get comfortable. Instead, let his knee fold into its natural position. If you want, you can squat down and rest his hoof on your knee. Now,

- 1) with the point of your shears, clean out any dirt that has gotten stuck between his walls and soles;
- 2) carefully cut off the wall at the tip of his toe so that it is even with his sole;
- 3) cut away any bent over or excess wall until it is level to the sole all the way around;
- 4) trim away any rotted out areas between the sole and hoof wall;
- 5) trim the tissue on his heels until the floor of his hoof is level to his hairline (this also stimulates the heels to grow and helps prevent contracted heels);

Great, only three more hooves to go! Some people like to straddle their goat when they reach down to do the back legs. If you are doing a goat whose hooves have been allowed to get very overgrown, you may not be able to cut the wall at the tip of the hoof completely down to the sole without causing the goat to bleed. Instead, trim off small amounts of the tip until you see pink. Stop at that point and don't cut the tip any further. Instead, work on the rest of wall going around the sole. Come back in a week and trim the toe some more. Do this weekly until the hoof looks normal.

If the hoof has a lot of rotten tissue, dip it in hydrogen peroxide or bleach (be careful not to get the bleach on your clothes) when you are done trimming. **Do not use a copper product like Koppertox on a market wether. It is illegal because it can leave residues in the meat.** If the goat appears to have foot rot or foot scald, set his hoof for 5 minutes in a coffee can filled with 1 part zinc sulfate (available as a fertilizer at agricultural stores) to 9 parts water and then isolate him from any other goats or sheep you own.

If the hoof bleeds while you are trimming it, don't panic. Press on the spot where it is bleeding to help the blood clot. You can also sprinkle blood clotting powder on it (corn starch will work in a pinch). If it is really spurting blood you may want to cauterize the spurting blood vessel with your disbudding iron or pinch it off with some sanitized needlepoint pliers (this rarely, if ever, turns out to be necessary). Give your goat a tetanus booster if his last one has expired.

Suggested Activities

- 1) If you are a beginner, help a friend trim their goat's hooves before tackling your own.*
- 2) If your club feels like you could all use more practice hoof trimming, contact a goat producer with lots of goats and see if your club can trim their goats' hooves. As you are trimming, discuss the differences in leg and feet conformation that you observe among different goats.
- 3) Teach a friend how to trim hooves or prepare a poster explaining how to trim hooves.
- 4) Learn to sharpen shears or trimmers.
- 5) Survey a goat farm that is pasturing its goats and one that is keeping its goats in a bedded barn all the time and observe if there is any difference in how their hooves wear after trimming.

* activity is suitable for cloverbuds.