Common Health Problems in Goats and Sheep

Helma Weeks
University of Pennsylvania
Common Health Problems in Goats and Sheep

Elsa and other goat cheeses are "in," goat's milk can be bought in health food stores, and hand knit, woolen sweaters are very much the fashion as are sheepskin coats. It is not surprising that more people are raising sheep and goats, not on the range, but on small farms near urban areas. Between 1978 and 1984 the membership in the American Dairy Goat Association increased by 110 percent.

These small farmers learn, often the hard way, that keeping and raising such animals for profit is not an easy task. Sheep and goats require care, and they have diseases and parasites which, if left untreated, reduce the production of milk and wool. But unlike the dairy or cattle farmer, sheep and goat owners frequently have problems finding proper veterinary care. "Sheep and goats are sort of in between the small and the large animal practice," explained Dr. Wendy Vaala, lecturer in large animal medicine at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. "Often neither the large nor the small animal practitioner will call at a sheep or goat farm. Also, it is a matter of economics for the farmer. He cannot afford expensive procedures." Therefore, owners seek veterinary assistance frequently. Traditions and lore have been handed down and people try to take care of these animals themselves. "In recent years though, students at the School have shown quite an interest in sheep and goats," said Dr. Vaala, "and we do try to expose them to these species as much as possible."

Health problems often begin at birth. "Many lambs are lost due to hypothermia," she explained. "They get chilled, the glucose level is low, they refuse to nurse and die. If something isn't done quickly, they are lost." She said that each January to March, preparations are made in the neonatal unit at New Bolton Center to help owners save these young. "We freeze colostrum and ready the facility to be able to warm up these animals on short notice. Colostrum is vital as it protects the youngsters against infectious diseases during the first weeks of life." She explained that difficult births are common in sheep because of the large number of twins. "Often one of the pair is weak and susceptible to hypothermia." Multiple births are responsible for another disorder, pregnancy toxemia. Late in pregnancy the ewe becomes listless, and hand knit, woolen sweaters are very much the fashion as are sheepskin coats. It is not surprising that more people are raising sheep and goats, not on the range, but on small farms near urban areas. Between 1978 and 1984 the membership in the American Dairy Goat Association increased by 110 percent.

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Alumni Day—
Saturday, May 17, 1986
—Philadelphia Campus

From the time of the first graduating class in 1887, alumni have returned to the School to celebrate the day that marks the beginning of their careers as veterinarians.

Please join us for all or part of the Veterinary Alumni Day festivities on Saturday, May 17, 1986. The day and evening have been planned for entertainment and celebration.

Coffee with the Dean and Faculty
The Veterinary Medical Alumni Society
Annual Meeting
A buffet luncheon (All you can eat)
Things to do and places to see:
- Tour the small animal hospital
- Visit the Philadelphia Zoo
- Marvel at the wonderful exhibits at the University of Pennsylvania Museum
- Bus tour through Society Hill, including visits to the Powel House, home of the last colonial mayor of the city and the “Father of American Surgery”

Dean Robert Marshak and the Veterinary Medical Alumni Society will co-host a reception for all veterinary alumni at the Franklin Plaza Hotel at 6:30 P.M. to be followed by dinner and a night of dancing.

Round trip bus transportation will be available from the Franklin Plaza Hotel to the School on Saturday, May 17th.

The 1987 PENN ANNUAL CONFERENCE WILL BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28, AND THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, AT THE ADAMS MARK HOTEL IN PHILADELPHIA.

Continuing Education
Brief
1986 Penn Annual Conference

Neither sleet, nor snow, nor freezing temperatures prevented 600 veterinarians from attending the School’s 1986 Penn Annual Conference. Alumni support (or the Conference has been in the School’s 1986 Penn Annual Conference.

Continuing Education

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1986 Spring Continuing Education Seminars at Penn

1986 Reunion Year Class Agents

1936—Earl Cook 1961—Paul Evans
1941—Robert Leech 1966—William Hardy, Jr.
1946—Seibert Berlin 1971—Gerald Pietzch
1951—Clarence Bryer 1976—Britan Kolbourne

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sucking intestinal worm. The animals become anemic and develop diarrhea. If they are not treated promptly, they can die. To prevent heavy worm infestation, manure samples should be checked frequently and the whole herd should be wormed at regular intervals. Also, when turning sheep out to pasture, every effort should be made to use a meadow which has been dormant from October to March and thus has a reduced parasite burden. Weaned lambs should go to clean pastures and not those used by ewes. Dairy goats which are kept inside are not so prone to parasites.

However, they have other problems. Sheep and goats are quite susceptible to respiratory ailments. Slowly progressive pneumonia occurs more in sheep. Ovine progressive pneumonia (OPP) is the most common viral pneumonia. "There is no cure," said Dr. Vaala. "One can only treat it supportively." Goats and sheep also develop bacterial pneumonia; this can be treated with drugs. "They have to be kept in a clean, dry, well ventilated environment to prevent respiratory diseases," she said. "There is a problem treating dairy goats with drugs; we don't quite know the period of time for which milk from these treated animals should be withheld from market.

Goats frequently develop arthritis. The joints swell and there is pain. The most common form, Caprine Arthritis-Encephalitis Syndrome (CAEV) is caused by a retrovirus. It is thought that it is passed through the collostrum. The virus is latent in many animals will not be affected until older. Some infected goats may show no signs while others become depressed and have weight loss. If CAEV is present in a herd, kids can show signs of neurological disease between the ages of one to four months. These animals frequently have an ascending spinal cord infection and the prognosis is poor. Arthritis in goats can also be bacterial in origin. These forms are treatable with antibiotics. Diet can play a role; if goats are fed too much alfalfa, they may develop arthritis.

Goats and sheep suffer from ccaeous lymphaditis infections, a disease affecting 99 percent of the herds. It is caused by Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis (ovis). Animals with the disease are not permitted to leave the state, as the illness is highly contagious. The infection causes abscesses. In sheep these occur most commonly at shearing laceration sites. Goats appear to contract the infection through ingestion; they often develop internal abscesses. These may involve internal lymph nodes in the thoracic (chest) and abdominal cavities and may involve organs such as the liver, lung or spleen. Chronic weight loss is often the most common complaint associated with internal abscesses. External abscesses can be excised or lanced and drained. Affected animals should be isolated from the rest of the herd/flock until all drainage has stopped. Internal abscesses are very difficult to diagnose and treat. Antibiotic therapy and surgical removal have been tried but often treatment is not successful and the affected animal is culled. In ewes and goats these
toward smaller group workshops in the after­noon, highly practitioner-oriented.

The lectures will emphasize principles of radiographic interpretation of the chest and abdomen. The workshop will be handled as a laboratory with teams of two to three people assigned to a viewbox with the Radiology faculty circulating to assist in radiographic interpretation of the presented cases. The lab­oratory will concentrate on recognition of nor­mal and abnormal radiographic findings of the chest and abdomen with specific emphasis on differential diagnosis.

Dr. Darryl Biery, Professor of Radiology
Dr. Sydney Evans, Instructor in Radiology
Dr. W. Harker Rhodes, Professor of Radiology
Dr. Mark Saunders, Resident in Radiology

Mrs. Frederick Rode (L) and Mary Ann Tuschak (R). Member of the Wilmington Financial Group, Ms. Tuschak has generously offered to co-sponsor publication of the 1986-1987 Student Directory.

Mr. Charles S. Wolf, chairman of the School's Board of Over­seers, calls the Board to order. The Board of Overseers held their winter meeting in conjunction with the Penn Annual Conference.

Animal Health Technician Conference
Harcum Junior College will sponsor an Animal Health Technician Conference on June 7 at the college in Bryn Mawr.

Topics include "Rapid Techniques in Microbial Identification," "Veterinary Dentistry: The Role of the AHT," "The Application of Accu­puncture, Infrared Laser, and Electromagnetic Field Therapies in Equine Medical Practice" and "Diagnostic Ultrasound: Principles and Application."

Participating conference faculty members are Ruth Dougherty, RVT, of Walnridge Equine Clinic; Dr. Colin Harvey, professor of surgery, University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine; Dr. Joseph Haines of the Fairhill Equine Veterinary Clinic; and Dr. Mark Saunders, resident in radiology, University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine.

The fee for the conference is $20 and four Continuing Education Units will be awarded. For further information, call (215) 525-3554.

Mrs. and Mrs. Roger Carus

Skin problems, too, can be a big headache for sheep and goats. In particular, they can be prone to lice in the winter and fall. A dipping program will help eliminate these pests. Also, the goat is the only food animal prone to ear mite infection. Ears should be checked periodically.

Mastitis is common in goats and sheep. Pre­vention is important as the bacteria causing the infection can be passed to the suckling young, causing illness. Milk from goats with mastitis should not be sold for human consumption or for cheese production as some of the organisms pose a threat to human health. Dairy goat owners should check their animals for evidence of mastitis by examining the milk in the strip cup prior to milking out the udder. Also, once a month, a California Mastitis Test should be performed. Mastitis seriously affects milk produc­tion and it is responsible for economic losses. Prevention includes clean milking equipment, washing of udder and teats and the milker's hands prior to milking, and dipping the teats after milking. It is very important that the animals are milked regularly and that the udder is emptied each time. If mastitis is suspected, a culture should be done to determine the causative organism and the proper antibiotic. If drugs are used to combat the infection, the bovine withdrawal time for the particular drug should be used as a guide, though it was found that drugs can be in evidence in goat's milk after the minimum withdrawal time indicated for bovines. This is particularly important if penicillin is used, a residue of this drug in milk can be fatal to people with an allergy to the drug.

Sheep and goat owners must protect their animals from accidental poisoning and confine them to a safe pasture. Goats in particular are very curious and, according to Dr. Vaala, are nibblers. "They will eat anything in sight," she said. "They love ornamentals and are not able to distinguish between harmless and poisonous plants. Also, fertilizers, herbicides and pesti­cides should be stored where they cannot reach them." Goats should not be allowed to roam. Particularly if the property is planted with azalea, rhododendrons, yews and other orna­mental shrubs as these can be lethal. Dr. Vaala also pointed out that goats and sheep should not be staked in an open area as they can be attacked by roaming dogs. If they must be staked, it should be in a protected enclosure.

Goats generally make better "pets" than sheep. "They follow one around like a puppy," she said. "They can be taught to walk on a leash and they are fun to watch. The African Pygmy goat is quite popular as a pet."

According to Dr. Vaala, veterinarians are becoming more interested in these species. "But much more research is needed before we fully understand the requirements of these animals and their diseases."

Dr. Roger Smith (V'57), President-elect of the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association (L) and Dr. Stewart Rockwell (Cor'S0), President of the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association (R). Drs. Rockwell and Smith are members of the Veterinary School's Alumni Society Executive Board.