

What you need to know about goat care

During the last six months or so I have had many phone calls about goats and weeds, but the underlying questions were about general goat care. This was disturbing, in that so many goat growers are coming into the industry without the knowledge of the basic care of their goats. This article is in response to some of those callers.

Yes, goats will eat almost everything - but so will horses, sheep and cattle, or any other grazing animal that gets loose in your paddock (or back yard). Goats just seem to do a better job of getting rid of what we don't want.

Goats do best on a mix of browse (scrub) and graze (pasture). They may look like "picky" eaters, but they just like lots of variety in their diet. Like all animals they may be trained to eat unwanted scrub that they may not initially go for.

All grazing animals need a suitable salt lick or mineral supplement, usually left near their water supply. They need less water than most animals but do need some, especially if lactating.

It helps in their management if you feed them something tasty, like grain or hay, occasionally. This makes them easier to muster and handle.

Necessary Treatments for Goats

Vaccination: Given by sub-cutaneous injection (under the skin). Bucks and breeding does, are vaccinated every six months, and kids have their first needle about six weeks old (sensitiser), and the second about six weeks later (booster).

Diseases to vaccinate against:

Tetanus. Symptoms are - stiff limbs, clamped jaws and eventually a rigid paralysis and death in several days. Treatment is seldom successful and very expensive.

Enterotoxaemia or Pulp Kidney. There are two forms, chronic and acute. The main symptoms are severe diarrhoea, and excruciating pain and crying, and finally death. Again treatment is seldom successful and very expensive.

CLA or Cheesy Gland. All animals sold for meat should be vaccinated for this, to prevent rejection at the abattoir. The animals are not greatly concerned by this condition, but the owners are out of pocket.

These diseases are covered by a 3:1 vaccine. A 5:1, or a 6:1 vaccine is available which covers these plus other diseases that goats are not prone to suffer. Since a vaccination tends to cause some pain, and the occasional abscess, it may be prudent to only give goats the antibodies that they really need.

Drenching: Animals are drenched by a squirt down the throat, to relieve them of intestinal, lung and stomach worms, liver fluke and other parasites. Never underdose with drenches as this can cause "drench resistance" in the target parasites.

There are four varieties of Drenches.

Seponver™, Narrow spectrum. Effective against Barbers Pole Worm, a blood sucking worm.

Symptoms - anaemia, bottle jaw, "fat nose", and debility. Common during hot wet summers.

Group 1, Broad spectrum, BZ Group, eg, Valbazan™, Panacur™, Oxfen™. A "White Drench". Inhibits worms through their energy system.

Group 2, Broad spectrum, Levamisole / Morantal, eg: Nilverm™, Oraljet™. A "Clear Drench". Paralyzes the worms nervous system.

Mectin, Broad spectrum. eg, Ivomec™, Cydectin™, Virbamec™..

Not all drenches are registered for use in goats, nor are they registered in all States. Therefore read the label and check with your Department of Agriculture. (See department contacts at end of article).

Drenches are quite expensive, so here are a few tips.

Ruminants have a unique feature known as the "oesophageal groove" which operates when the young animal is suckling. Introduction of fluid into the mouth causes this muscle to contract and form a groove, that has the effect (in the kid) of directing the milk past the rumen into the abomasum (second stomach). Research has shown that some conditions can stimulate its reactivation. Therefore the most effective method of drenching is to position the drench gun tip over the tongue and direct the drench down the throat. Do not tip the goats head up too much, or the drench will go down into the lungs.

Reducing the feed intake is likely to slow the movement rate in the gut, and prolongs the time for drug absorption. Sheep and goats should not be drenched directly off pasture for this reason.

Goats metabolise anthelmintics faster than sheep, consequently the drug is available for a shorter time.

It has also been shown that doubling the dose does not increase the efficiency of the treatment - in fact you can kill the goat. However, if the same double dose was given as one single dose, followed by two half doses, twelve and twenty four hours later, efficiency against worms increased enormously. This method can be used if your vet recommends increased dose rates for worm control.

When two drenches are given, eg: Seponver™ and a broad spectrum drench, they should be given separately, unless it says on the label that they can be combined. Closicomb™, and Closal™ are ready mixed, combination drenches.

Allow the goats to empty for four hours, in the yards, before moving them to a clean paddock.

Paddocks with good browse are more suitable to worm control in goats, than all-pasture paddocks. Worm larvae are only found on grass to a height of about 12 cm.

Do not drench and delouse at the same time as the chemicals may be

the basics

incompatible within the goat.

Other Treatments Which May be Necessary.

These include Hoof Paring and Horn Tipping, neither of which I will cover here.

External Parasites:

Ticks can kill goats, but this is mainly a coastal problem. Increased sulphur as an additive in rations or in a mineral block, seems to help the goat, but vigilance by the owner is probably the best answer.

Biting, or Red lice feed on the surface debris of the skin. They are host specific and cannot spread to other animals.

Sucking, or Blue lice feed on the blood. These can cross infect between sheep and goats.

Lice infestation on goats can severely affect the well being of the animal, so much as to cause goats to loose a lot of condition. This brings us back full circle. A healthy goat with no "passengers" is a credit to the grower, and should be capable of its full potential.

Information recently received from the Goat Industry Council of Australia (GICA), indicates that Meat and Livestock Australia is negotiating with manufacture's to have one of the mectin drenches, and a licide approved for use on goats, with MLA bearing part of the cost. If this

is successful, MLA propose to support the qualification of more of these products over subsequent years.

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