

Care of the In-Kid Goat

BRITISH GOAT SOCIETY INFORMATION LEAFLET

The run up to kidding is a crucial time for getting management right as a straightforward kidding is essential for a good lactation, which is what the smallholder is looking for. A complicated kidding can impact on the early days of the goat's lactation in an adverse way and can knock back the potential yield of the goat. This is clearly not in the interests of the smallholder as it is the milk that is needed to contribute to the running of the holding, either to rear animals for meat or to provide milk and other delicious produce for the house.

Signs of Being In-Kid

Goats are normally mated in the autumn and start coming in season in response to decreasing day length. The healthy goat will come in season every 21 days if not mated, and the absence of the heat period 21 days after a successful mating is the first sign of the goat being pregnant. A close eye should be kept on the goat 42 days after a successful mating also, as it is not uncommon for a return heat to be seen at this time. Some goat keepers choose to get their in-kid goats scanned for pregnancy as is common with sheep. Many sheep scanners are happy to do this for a reasonable fee. It is the best way of confirming pregnancy when compared to other methods of pregnancy testing, such as urine tests, blood tests and milk tests. There are several less conventional methods of pregnancy testing that can be used by those who have faith in them, such as holding a nail or washer tied to a piece of string over the hips of the goat. The direction the nail or washer swing in is meant to indicate pregnancy or not. I know of several goat keepers who rely on this method, but there never seems any consistency in the way the washer is meant to swing!

Drying off

If the goat is milking, she will need to be dried off prior to kidding - all goats need a rest between lactations. Some goats are great at doing this themselves – one sniff of a male goat and all thoughts of milk production stop – whilst some goats seem to forget they are in kid and it can be quite a job to get them dry in plenty of time before kidding. There are various ways of drying a goat off:

- 1) wait until the yield at each milking is 2kg and then miss a milking out. Continue milking once per day until the yield falls to 2kg and then milk every 3rd milking.
- 2) when the yield drops to 2kg start to milk every 4th milking. Beyond this then the goat will probably have got the message and will naturally dry off. Some books recommend leaving milk in the udder when milking as a method of drying off. This method has the disadvantage that the milking process opens the end of the teat up and potentially allows bacteria to enter the udder. If the udder is empty there is less chance of a mastitis infection occurring than if there is milk in the udder.
- 3) Other sources suggest varying milking times and routines. This may be a suitable method if the smallholder's routine will allow this.

Feed will need to be adjusted accordingly to aid the drying off process, but the goats should have its feed cut too drastically as there are growing kids to consider.

Feeding

The key to feeding any goat, and not least the in kid goat, is to keep them fit, but not fat. For the first few months of pregnancy then the feed will not need to be increased, if at all, until the last 8 weeks or so. As always, good hay should be available all the time. If the feed is increased it should only be by a small amount and care should be taken not to overfeed, which can induce metabolic disorders either prior to or after kidding. It is far better to keep the feed constant through the pregnancy as for the first 8-10 weeks of pregnancy the goat will still be milking and will need to be fed as such. As the goat starts to dry off the kids will be growing at a faster rate and the goat will need the nutrition provided to enable the kids to grow properly. The important thing is not to over-feed the goat. Too much feed will result in a fat goat which has the potential to develop pregnancy toxæmia (known as twin lamb disease in sheep). This is a metabolic disorder and is caused by inadequate nutrition at a time when the kids are rapidly growing.

Various treatments are available to treat pregnancy toxæmia, but it is far better to avoid the condition, rather than treat it. If you suspect your goat has pregnancy toxæmia, then you should get veterinary attention to the goat as soon

as possible. The in-kid goat should always have an appetite and be keen for its food. Keeping the feed at a sensible level that the goats clear up quickly at each feed is the best rule of thumb.

Goatlings, young goats in kid for the first time, will require careful feeding in the summer prior to mating to avoid them being overweight at mating time. This care in feeding will need to continue during pregnancy to ensure that the goatling does not become fat and prone to pregnancy toxaemia.

Feet

The goat will need her feet trimming regularly through pregnancy. The feet have to carry extra weight as the pregnancy progresses and it is essential that the goat feels comfortable on her feet. If the feet have been regularly trimmed then the goat will be used to this procedure. Ideally the feet should not be trimmed in the last 6 weeks of pregnancy to avoid having the goat having to stand on 3 legs for a period of time and potentially struggle. This could cause unnecessary stress to the goat and the developing kids and in extreme cases, injury.

Vaccination

The colostrum, or the first milk, that the kid suckles from its mother is packed full of nutrition and antibodies. These antibodies will help to give the kid an immune system in the first few weeks of life. Therefore it is essential that the goat is given a vaccination booster 4 to 6 weeks prior to kidding. This will give time for the goat to produce antibodies in response to the vaccine and then be able to pass them on to its offspring through the colostrum.

Worming

The goats should already be part of a worm control programme that has been devised on the basis of faecal egg counts and veterinary advice. When the goats come in off pasture for the winter, a faecal egg count should be carried out and if necessary a dose of appropriate wormer should be given. Worms, being a parasite, will impair the efficiency of the digestive system and therefore the digestive system should be clear of worms during the goats pregnancy to ensure that the maximum amount of nutrition from the food ends up in the body and not feeding parasites.

Lice control

It is not uncommon for goats to get a few lice in the winter months. They should be regularly checked for lice as part of the normal routine, but this becomes even more essential around kidding time. Lice can also easily be transmitted to the young kids. The goat should be checked and treated if any lice are found. Tell-tale signs are rubbed patches on the shoulders and on the rump above the tail.

Mucking out

It is always a bit of a quandary deciding when to muck out an in kid goat. The goats' bed, if it is deep littered, is its central heating system. In colder weather the bed will help keep the goat warm. However, kidding in a clean pen is preferable to avoid the potential for disease to be spread. This is less of a concern with goats kidding later in the year, but certainly a consideration for those goats which kid in February and early March. Whatever is decided, the goat needs a clean bed with plenty of fresh straw at kidding time.

Exercise

The depths of winter are not the best of times for getting goats outside for exercise. The ground can be wet and poached or frozen. This is when a concrete exercise yard comes in to its own. However, too much time out exercising can do more harm than good. Half an hour or so outside the pen is ideal. Beware of the fun and games that other members of the herd might be having when they are out for exercise. It may be better to allow the pregnant members of the herd to exercise on their own rather than with the rest of the herd.

Summary

Each and every goat and pregnancy is different and there is no substitute for experience when managing in-kid goats. This leaflet gives a summary of considerations that warrant further reading or advice from more experienced goat keepers. Try and visit experienced goat keepers and see how they manage their in-kid goats. The British Goat Society web site www.allgoats.com contains some useful advice and the publication "Goat Feeding" can be purchased from them. There is a video/DVD "Goat Breeding and Kid Rearing" by Hilary Matthews that can be obtained from smallholder suppliers and similar bookshops.

For further information contact: The Secretary, British Goat Society
42 Manse Way, Swanley, Kent BR8 8DD
Tel: 01322 611767, Email: admin@britishgoatsociety.com
www.britishgoatsociety.com

