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HOOF ISSUES IN SHEEP AND GOATS

Introduction

If you raise goats and sheep and live in an area where it rains often or have pastures that don't drain well, then you've likely had to deal with hoof problems in your herd/flock. Hoof issues and diseases can affect productivity by impacting the health and well-being of your animals. This is why it is important to check hooves regularly for signs of disease and overgrowth. Lameness is often a symptom of hoof disease and should never be ignored. Some hoof diseases that result in lameness include bluetongue, foot abscess, laminitis (founder), sore mouth (contagious ecthyma), and foot-and-mouth disease. However, while these diseases are very serious and can result in animal death, foot rot and foot scald occur much more frequently, and treatment costs and losses in production can result in many producers becoming frustrated and leaving the industry.

Foot Rot

Foot rot is caused by two anaerobic (exist only in the absence of oxygen) bacteria, Fusobacterium necrophorum and Dichelobacter nodosus, and is very contagious. Infected animals spread the bacteria by contaminating manure, bedding, pastures, and equipment. These bacteria are present wherever you have grazing sheep and goats. Animals with foot rot usually present with limping and lameness, and often graze on their front knees. Even though foot rot is not deadly, it can result in reduced overall performance in a herd/flock due to the animal's inability to move and obtain adequate nutrients from feed and forage. On inspection, foot rot presents with a foul, rotten odor and soft, bloody, or pus-filled areas of the sole. It is best to treat the entire herd when/if foot rot is detected in a few animals. Trimming overgrown hooves will prevent the packing of mud and manure and reduce the chance of survival of these anaerobic bacteria. Additionally, soaking the hooves in a 10% zinc/copper sulfate solution for at least 15 minutes once weekly for several weeks following trimming will further help control or eradicate this issue.

Hoof growth is influenced not only by soil moisture, nutrition, and management but also by breed and genetics. Therefore, culling individuals that show susceptibility to foot rot by requiring multiple trims and year-round treatment is a good idea.

Foot Scald

Foot rot and foot scald are distinct conditions. Foot scald refers to irritation and inflammation occurring between the toes of sheep or goats, often leading to the development of lesions. It is primarily caused by the anaerobic bacteria Fusobacterium necrophorum. Foot scald is not contagious; however, if left untreated, it can lead to foot rot. On inspection between the hooves, foot scald can appear white, red, or swollen, and it is generally sensitive to touch. The animal will kick and bleat when a hoof is held for close inspection. Foot scald is generally treated with a topical solution of zinc sulfate or Koppertox® after the removal of any mud, stones, or manure.

Hoof Trimming

Whether you raise sheep or goats, or both, learning to trim their hooves properly is an essential management skill. When trimming, it is vital to have a good hoof trimmer/shears. A new/sharp hoof trimmer can result in deep unintentional cuts into the hoof or injury to the individual trimming, so care should always be taken. On the other hand, a dull hoof trimmer will make the task longer and less efficient. To trim hooves, secure the animal by flipping onto the rump (sheep) or the side (goat), use a harness, milking stand, or tilt table (electric or manual), or have a helper. Inspect the hoof carefully and start by removing any mud/manure from the sole or between the hooves. Trim overgrown hoof wall, sole, toe, and heel carefully without cutting too deeply. If the hoof is trimmed aggressively and huge chunks are removed at a time, the hoof will bleed. The general rule is to stop once you see any pink. Cutting too deeply will not help the healing process but might facilitate the spread of the bacteria that cause foot rot. Most animals will simply have overgrown hooves. However, if foot scald or foot rot is observed, treat as described previously.

Virginia Cooperative Extension



FINISHING LAMBS ON PASTURE

Some producers prefer to finish lambs on an all-forage diet.

Finishing lambs on pasture can be a great way for producers to manage feed costs. However, producers should consider several questions as they develop their plan to finish their lambs.

One of their first questions should be how they plan to market their lambs. Do they have a specific date for marketing their lambs? Do their buyers require specific production practices, such as only grass-fed, or do buyers focus more on carcass characteristics? Then, second, what do they plan to feed them? If they choose to finish their animals on pasture, there are some considerations to keep in mind.

While forages generally mean lower feed costs, they also mean slower growth rates. Managing growth rates allows a producer to plan marketing to meet a particular weight range at a specific marketing date. A typical growth rate for lambs on pasture is 0.25 to 0.33 pounds per day, which can be achieved on cool-season grass-legume mix pastures commonly found across Pennsylvania. Pastures must be growing in a vegetative state and be of high quality. Pastures must also be rotationally grazed to maintain high-quality forage, and to help prevent internal parasite issues. One of the biggest challenges producers face is maintaining high-quality pastures throughout the grazing season, particularly during the summer slump.

As temperatures rise during the summer, forage quality normally decreases, as does forage growth rate. In addition, forage nutritional value decreases due to maturity. Producers can expect decreases in protein and energy content and increases in fiber. These factors make it difficult to plan for consistent-quality forage and thus consistent weight gains on pasture. If temperatures remain high and there is little cooling at night, this can also affect dry matter intake.

Producers can seek to manage this summer slump by incorporating forages less susceptible to it, such as perennials with deep tap roots and warm-season annuals. Penn State Extension's article "Grazing During the Summer Slump" states, "To supply summer forage, it is ideal to have a portion of the farm in warm-season annuals and/or perennials. These forages are adapted to high temperatures and dry soils. Examples are millets, sudangrass and sorghum-sudan hybrids, teff, Sunn hemp, cowpea, forage soybean, switchgrass, big bluestem, and Indiangrass." Forage chicory mixed with a legume is another option to provide high-quality forage during the summer months.

When grazing forage chicory, lambs should be moved every 3 to 5 days to prevent grazing the regrowth from plant crowns. According to Chicory: An Alternative Livestock Forage from the University of Kentucky, grazing studies in New Zealand have reported daily gains of 0.6 pounds per day for lambs. However, this can vary somewhat throughout the season and will decrease once the chicory plants mature and send up a seed stalk.

Producers grazing lambs on cool-season perennial pastures and who wish to increase daily gains may want to consider feeding a supplement, particularly when forage quality becomes low. The amount can vary, depending on the desired rate of gain, but should not exceed 1% of a lamb's body weight. For example, a lamb weighing 75 pounds should not consume more than 0.75 pounds of a supplement per day. Furthermore, the type of supplement can influence forage digestibility. According to Sheep 201, "Research with cattle suggests that supplementation with feedstuffs that are high in starch, such as grain, reduces forage digestibility, as compared to energy supplements with highly digestible fiber sources (soybean hulls, corn gluten meal)."

Research at the Eastern Ohio Resource Development Center looked at the effect of finishing lambs with a corn/soybean meal or soy hull supplement. Lambs had access to a self-feeder, and researchers looked at weight gains, carcass characteristics, and costs. They found that animal performance and carcass characteristics were similar for the two methods. However, they did find a difference in the amount of feed consumed and the cost to finish. Lambs consumed more feed per pound of gain, 5.6 pounds average for the soy hull supplement versus 4.28 pounds for the corn/soybean meal supplement, and the cost per pound of gain averaged $0.03 higher for the soy hull supplement. They noted that in the first year of their trial, soy hulls had higher feed waste, particularly if they got wet.

Overall, pasture can be a viable method to feed lambs in a finishing program. However, remember that supplement costs can vary greatly from year to year. Regardless of the method used to finish lambs on pasture, producers should be aware of their costs, including total feed costs, cost per pound of gain, and lamb value when marketed.

Penn State Extension

FALL GRAZING DOS AND DON'TS

Many regions of the United States are still experiencing the aftermath from an exceptionally dry start to the summer. Even as milder temperatures bring cool-season forages out of their drought-induced dormancy, producers must continue to be mindful about grazing management.

In a recent article from the University of Minnesota, Craig Shaeffer, extension forage specialist, and a team of extension educators remind producers to avoid overgrazing, reduce stocking rates, give pastures adequate rest, and control weeds this fall. Doing so will protect drought-stressed forage from further damage and maintain animal performance.

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Avoid overgrazing: Some species can tolerate more defoliation than others, but in general, plants must not be grazed lower than 4 inches. This is typically advised at any time of year, but it is especially critical following a dry growing season. The authors explain when cool-season forages go dormant during drought, plant leaves and stems stop growing but growing points and crowns remain active. Overgrazing removes these growing points and drains root reserves.

"Perennial ryegrass, orchardgrass, and timothy store energy in stem bases and are especially susceptible to combined stress of overgrazing and drought, while alfalfa, smooth bromegrass, quackgrass, and reed canarygrass are more tolerant. Shallow rooted species like Kentucky bluegrass and red clover are also damaged by overgrazing," the authors write.



Reduce stocking rates: With less forage available, reducing the number of animals on pasture will stretch feed supplies. This can be achieved by culling livestock from the grazing herd and/or relocating livestock to a dry lot or sacrifice paddock and feeding them hay. Assess feed costs and cull prices to determine the most cost-effective solution.

If producers choose to feed more hay, the authors suggest calculating how much forage will be needed through the winter. Test hay quality to ensure it meets animals' needs and inspect forage for mold or weed contamination before making any purchases.

Another consideration of feeding hay is elevated water intake. "Livestock normally obtain some water from consuming moist pasture, and switching to dry hay will necessitate more water availability, especially if air temperatures are warm," the authors note.

Give pastures rest: Even if pastures start to green up after some precipitation, drought-stressed plants are likely not strong enough to withstand regular grazing. Giving livestock access to a pasture before it has sufficient time and moisture to make a full recovery can reduce stand persistence.

"It takes 4 to 6 inches of water to produce a ton of cool-season grass or alfalfa. Smaller amounts of rainfall may stimulate regrowth, but grazing of tall-growing grasses should be delayed until there is 8 to 10 inches of regrowth," the authors assert. "While grazing regrowth before plants reach these minimum heights may provide forage, it can weaken plants and reduce the long-term productivity of the pasture."

Control weeds: Some weed species can take advantage of drought conditions and proliferate when cool-season forage goes dormant. The authors warn that in addition to low nutritive value, some weeds like lambsquarters and pigweed can accumulate high levels of nitrates that are toxic to livestock. To successfully eliminate weeds, it is best to apply herbicide around a rainfall event.

"This results in improved translocation of systemic herbicides and killing of crowns, lateral roots, and rhizomes," the authors state. "Always read the herbicide label prior to use. Ensure the product is labeled for pastures and follow all grazing restrictions and recommendations related to environmental conditions at the time of use."

Ohio State Extension

CAUSES OF BLOAT IN GOATS

What is bloat in goats?

Bloat is the symptom that occurs when a ruminant animal cannot burp.

The rumen produces a lot of gas from the fermentation of food, and goats (as well as all other ruminants) normally get rid of this gas by belching. If something blocks the escape of gas from the rumen, the rumen will begin to expand. You will notice a large bulge on the animal's left side, as if it had swallowed a soccer ball.

What causes bloat in goats?

There are two major causes of goat bloat.

1. Obstruction in the goat's esophagus

One is an obstruction of the esophagus; the goat may have swallowed something large, and it is stuck. In this case, you may be able to feel the obstruction in the throat. If you cannot gently work it down the esophagus, get a veterinarian's help. You never want to be rough with an obstruction, since you don't know if it has sharp edges. Under no circumstances should you ever try to push the obstruction down the throat using any kind of instrument. If the obstruction does not feel soft and pliable, do not put any kind of pressure on it, or you may cause serious damage.

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2. Consumption of inappropriate food or diet change

The second major reason for goat bloat is that either the goat has gotten into a source of soluble carbohydrates such as grain, or someone tried to change its diet too quickly. With a quick diet change, rumen microbes cannot deal with that amount of unfamiliar feed. Common sources of soluble carbohydrates are grain, the first fresh clover in the spring, and many weeds and forbs that produce high starch levels in the fall in response to cold nights.

The result of eating too much of these feeds is a shift in the pH of the rumen, resulting in death of the normal microbes, leaving "bad" microbes to increase in number and work on the feed to produce foam. The foam fills up the rumen and blocks the entrance to the esophagus, preventing the escape of gas. (This response is often the result of a mild grain overload or a meal of the first fresh clover of the season, as opposed to a severe overload that could quickly kill the goat.)

What to do about goat bloat

The best course of action is to call your veterinarian. Common traditional treatments include mineral oil to try to settle the foam, but your veterinarian will have much more effective surfactants that will decrease the foam and allow your goat to belch away the problem. Serious cases may require stronger intervention from your veterinarian. The best prevention is to keep the goat separated from food it is not supposed to have, and to make any dietary changes very gradually.

Purina Mills

TAKE A GOLDILOCKS APPROACH TO GOAT MINERAL INTAKE

Just like Goldilocks, an important part of a successful goat mineral program is balance. Too little intake, and your goats won't get the nutrients they need. Too much, and your cost of mineral fed starts to climb.

If you're feeding a quality mineral and everything's balanced as it should, performance can increase with better feed efficiency, fertility enhances from higher kid crops and health outcomes can improve. On the flip side, when a quality mineral isn't present, conception rates drop, hoof problems pickup and performance can fall.

Get just the right amount of mineral consumption with these tips:

Consistency is key to drive intakes

A pivotal element to any goat mineral program is providing vital nutrients your goats might lack and having it available when they need it. Mineral consumption can fluctuate throughout the year based on forage quality, but there is never a point where goats won't need mineral. To ensure consistent intake, provide a balanced mineral year-round.

Feeding mineral year-round is cost-saving because goats don't have to play catch up. Every time the mineral feeder is empty, they're trying to balance themselves. But when there is mineral already present, they won't need to catch up.

A weatherized mineral can also further enhance mineral consumption.

Utilizing a weatherized mineral with larger particle sizes benefits consumption because the mineral won't clump up when wet or blow away.

Look for balanced nutrients

Quality minerals for goats balance nutrients like calcium, cobalt, phosphorus, iodine, manganese, selenium and zinc. They all have a role in optimizing and maintaining performance.

Calcium is especially important for goats because having it at a high enough rate limits the risk of hypocalcemia and improves reproduction.

Additionally, it is crucial to have a mineral mix formulated specifically for sheep or goats because copper is toxic to sheep if fed at the requirements needed for goats.

Salt on its own won't cut it

Goats need salt. However, offering salt as the only mineral available to your herd won't meet all their needs. It's not uncommon in some pastures to see goats only receiving a salt block. That won't get the job done when you want to push for higher weaning rates and breeding percentages.

When salt is fed at too high of a level, goats can become dehydrated or even stop grazing as actively. Rather than feeding a salt block or on its own from a bag, feed salt in a balanced mineral fortified with trace minerals and vitamins to meet your herd's total nutrient requirements. And as a bonus, if you feed a quality mineral, like Purina® Wind and Rain® Goat Mineral, there is no need for additional salt.

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Mineral site considerations

Mineral has additional advantages outside of providing nutrition to goats. When placed strategically in a pasture, mineral can optimize how goats graze.

Move mineral sites throughout the pasture during the grazing season to help the herd move to underutilized areas of forage. Use your best judgment when moving mineral sites to get the optimum consumption of mineral and forages.

One important thing to remember is you don't want mineral consumption to fall too low. If you move mineral sites too far from heavily trafficked areas like shade or water, consumption can fall.

Getting your goat mineral program just right through year-round availability, balanced ingredients and consistent intake will go a long way to helping your herd perform.

Purina Mills

Product Feature

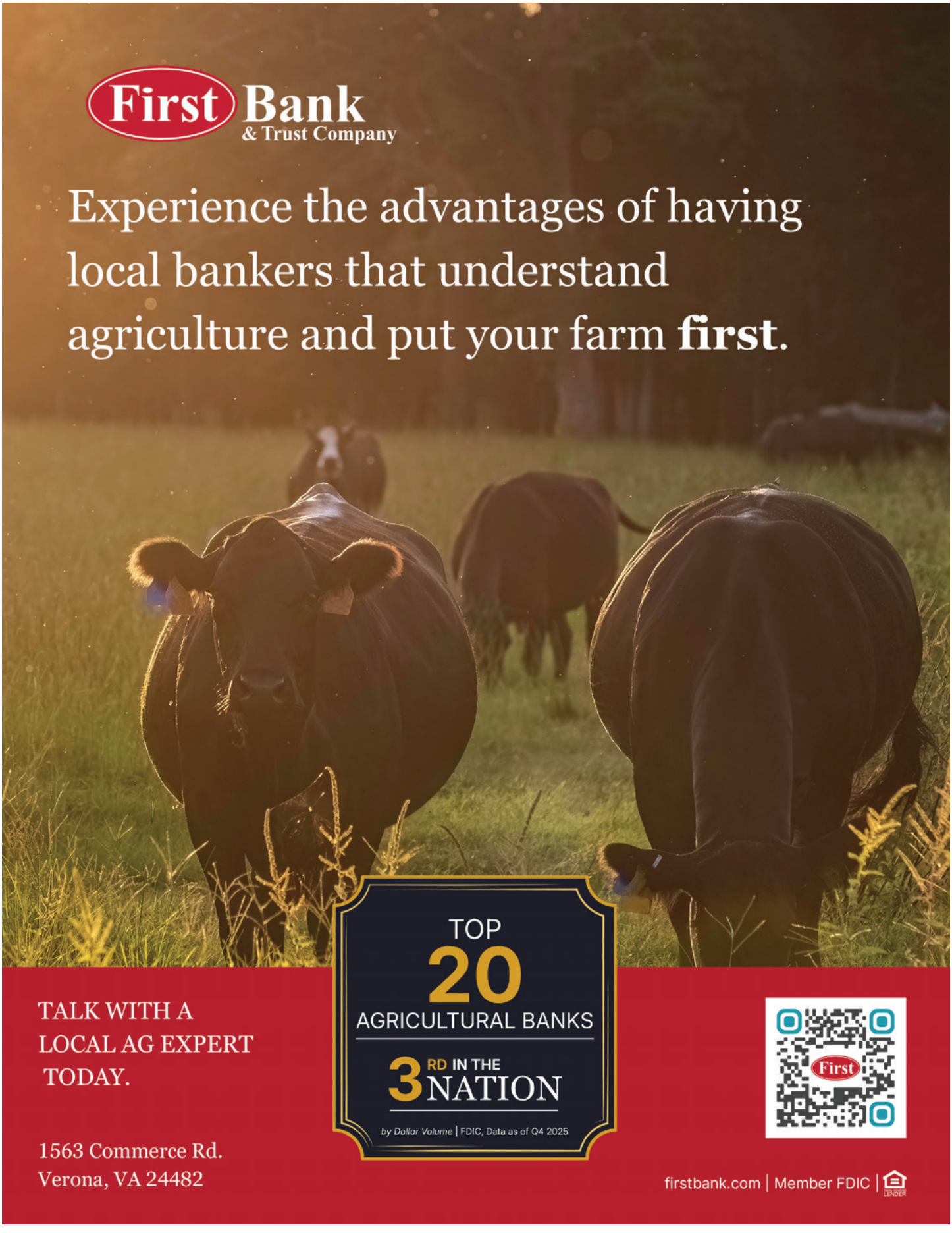
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Meet the agronomy team and enjoy lunch on us!
Vendors will be in attendance.

RSVP required by January 29, 2027.
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