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Pregnancy Testing for Small Ruminants

Falling leaves, cool weather, and the strong smell of bucks in rut (if you raise goats, you know what I'm talking about) meet me when I walk out the door to do morning chores. All signs of fall, and with fall comes breeding season for goats and sheep in hopes of spring kids and lambs.

A lot of planning, time, and care goes into the arrival of kids/lambs making spring an exciting, and maybe stressful, time for sheep and goat producers. While one can often tell by looking at a doe/ewe if she is pregnant when it gets closer her due date, sometimes it is more desirable to confirm if a doe/ewe is bred closer to the breeding date. Doing a blood test or an ultrasound are the two options for pregnancy testing sheep/goats.

Doing a blood test to detect pregnancy requires taking a blood sample and sending it into a lab to be tested. There are several labs that offer pregnancy testing for small ruminants and the test usually costs less than five dollars an animal, making it a very cost-effective option. Blood samples can be taken at 28 days after breeding and test results from blood samples have been found to have an accuracy of ninety percent.

Having an ultra-sound done for a doe is usually more expensive than a blood test because you have the cost of the ultrasound machine or the expense of paying someone to ultrasound your herd. However, ultrasounds give the option to estimate how far along a doe/ewe is if a breeding date is not known and how many kids/lambs she is carrying. Ultrasounds can be done 45 days after breeding to confirm pregnancy and have an accuracy of ninety-eight percent when done by an experienced person.

Confirming if does and ewes are bred early in gestation can be a cost saving management practice when compared to the cost of feeding open does/ewes through the winter. If you "pen breed" (turn a buck/ram in with the does/ewes for a couple of months) and are not sure when or if the does/ewes were bred, using a marking harness or marking paint on the buck/ram can help identify which does/ewes have been bred and changing the color of marker used about every 18 days can help identify which does/ewes where bred a second time to give a better estimate of when they are due to kid/lamb in the spring. If you decide to confirm the does/ewes are bred by blood test or ultrasound it is recommended to do so after the buck/ram has been taken out.

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