

Get ready — here come the kids

LANCASTER — The Alpine doe seems restless as her five month gestation nears its end. The 2-year-old goat has undergone dramatic changes in the last few weeks from the accelerated growth of her unborn kids.

After much pacing and pawing, she selects a site away from her herd mates and settles down. Her uterus contracts more frequently as the birth of her young is minutes away.

The scene will be repeated thousands of times as goat breeders gear up for the kidding season which generally runs from February to April. To insure a healthy kid crop this season, breeders should meet several nutrition and management objectives when maintaining the late lactation or dry doe.

According to the Penn State Veterinary Science Extension, goat breeders should accomplish the following:

- ✓ Dry off the udder and prevent mastitis;
- ✓ Have the doe in good physical condition for kidding;
- ✓ Bring the doe through kidding with the least possible damage to her udder and minimum of stress;
- ✓ Prevent pregnancy disease (ketosis) before and after kidding;
- ✓ Prevent post-kidding reproductive tract infections;
- ✓ Have the doe's digestive system in condition to give her a good appetite and enable her to eat a large amount of feed for maximum milk production.

A pregnant doe should be dry for at least 50 days before kidding for normal production in the future lactation.

To dry off a doe milking less than five pounds a day, simply stop milking her. However, high producers may need other practices to halt the milk let down mechanism.

The Extension suggests withholding grain and succulent feed. Instead, feed poor quality hay and cut down water intake for a couple of days. When she drops below five pounds daily, stop milking her. It helps to keep the doe away from the sights and sounds of milking.

After does have been dried off at least five days, hand strip any coagulated milk remaining in the udder.

The buttermilk-like fluid remaining during the first week or two following drying off, is normal and should be stripped. During the remainder of the dry period, a small quantity of honey-colored fluid is also normal.

Mastitis prevention is a key management factor during the dry period, beginning with the teat ends.

Carefully examine teat ends for evidence of chapping or irritation. A few days treatment with a non-irritant teat dip or several ap-

plications of antibiotic ointment may be worthwhile. Treat any quarters where there is any evidence of teat injury with a dry treatment antibiotic infusion. Consult your veterinarian before using any drug.

A proper nutrition program helps set the stage for healthy kids and does that will breed back in six to seven months.

Late lactation does should be fed a minimum of grain and a maximum of forage. Goat owners should be careful to prevent fattening in these does.

Protein requirements are relatively high for the doe in the last four weeks of pregnancy. The Extension recommends feeding at least a pound daily of the same feed she will receive after freshening.

Dry doe maintenance includes mixed grass and legume hay. If browse is available, let her eat all she wants. Coarse fiber material restores rumen capacity and function back to normal in does which have been fed a relatively large amount of grain and high quality forage during the previous lactation. Dry does need at least the same percent protein in the concentrate fed as is fed to the milking herd to prevent udder congestion at freshening, which is generally caused by protein deficiency. Limited salt intake, (less than one percent in grain) helps reduce risk of udder congestion.

However, the Extension cautions against does losing condition in the last month of pregnancy as this



Proper dry doe nutrition sets the stage for a healthy kidding season and future lactations. The bulk of a dry doe's diet should include more forage than concentrate. Mixed hay and when available, browse, are recommended.

may result in some degree of ketosis.

A correctly fed dry doe is in lean active condition, alert and hungry for food.

Goats raised in the Eastern U.S., a selenium deficient region, should receive selenium injections at

least four weeks prior to kidding. The Extension also suggests injections of Vitamins A, D and E. The combination of selenium and vitamins appear to promote good uterine involution following kidding and are helpful for preventing reproductive tract infections in the doe. Consult a veterinarian for

injection schedule and source of selenium and vitamins.

Does can experience discomfort with heavy, tight udders prior to kidding. Pressure can be relieved by milking her out a few days before kidding. However, save a quart of colostrum for the kid's first feeding. Many good udders

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Just minutes old, this Alpine buck kid unsteadily rises to the occasion with a little maternal urging.



A meal awaits him, but not here.



"Eureka, I've found it!" For all his efforts, the newborn buck is rewarded with a hearty meal, a bellyful of colostrum.



"Am I getting close?"