

Goats – Technical Note

Assessing Males Pre Breeding

September 2013



This time of year sees the start of the natural breeding season in this part of the world. It's a time for ensuring your breeding stock are in top condition and for culling out those that are below their best or may cause future problems. Simple checks of the teeth and udders and assessing body condition score will guarantee that your does are in peak physical condition before the season begins. However, it's also incredibly important to assess your males. Remember if you are using one male for every 20 or even 30 females and he is not performing to his best (or at all!), it will have a huge effect on reproductive performance and of course on farm profitability. There are a few simple pointers that will ensure your buck is ready and fit for action:

Body Condition Score

A buck needs a body condition score of at least 3.5 before the start of the breeding season. If below this, extra supplementation is vital to get him in top condition. This should be a high protein feed as protein is very important in sperm production. This supplementation should be continued right throughout the breeding period as his mind will be on more important matters and bucks can lose up to 17% of their bodyweight over the course of the season.

Genitalia

The scrotum should be examined for abnormalities. The testicles produce the sperm and should be large, symmetrical and firm - like a clenched bicep. Any irregularities such as lumps or softness may indicate a problem. Running alongside the testicle is an area called the epididymis. It is spongy to the touch and is the area where sperm is stored. Again, check that it is present and is without irregularities. In newly purchased males the penis should also be examined to make sure it emerges without any problem.

Feet

The feet should be trimmed (and treated where necessary) four weeks before the breeding season. Particular care should be taken with the rear feet as these take the entire weight of the buck during the mating process.

Brisket

This is an area often overlooked but is subject to a lot of pressure, particularly as the male mounts the females. Check for irregularities and soreness as these will lead to a reluctance to mount.

Vaccines & Dosing

Ensure the buck has received his booster for clostridial diseases and consider dosing for leptospirosis. A dewormer should also be administered a month before the breeding season.

Libido

As the season commences, keep a close eye on the activities of your male. Libido is not often a problem with goats but will lead to a very significant reduction in pregnancy rates if it does occur.

Have you any more tips or ideas? The huge experience of all goat farmers is an amazing resource to be tapped into so please feel free to give your own hints on how to maximise the reproductive performance of your farm!

Cian Condon

National Goat Adviser

087-9196515

cian.condon@teagasc.ie