

WEATHER and GOATS!

I was not exactly motivated by the article that I had intended for this issue, but after visiting my poultry processor and telling her that I couldn't "get into this issue", she said I should write about "weather". I have to tell you – it did strike a nerve. So, I scrapped the old, put it in limbo and commenced to write this weather article. It is a pretty important management issue that goat producers often overlook. *"You must accommodate to weather because you certainly can not change it."* So, be mindful that weather conditions can seriously affect your animals, and you must react accordingly. Here are some factors to consider.

COLD - Cold temperatures cause stress and requires a lot of energy to keep the animal warm. Animals that are not at their optimum health will be more susceptible to internal and external parasites. Forages that freeze during a cold snap, can sometimes cause prussic acid or nitrates to build up in the plant. If goats eat the forage before the acids dissipate, it can be deadly (sometimes it takes as long as twenty one days for dissipation in the plant.) Dehydration can occur during the cold when their water source might be frozen. If you don't have water tank heaters installed, you should check your animals frequently during frigid weather.

RAIN - After a rainy bout, parasites and problems will "jump" on the animals. Also, wet, muddy areas are prime conditions for foot problems. This problem can be solved somewhat, by installing "agri-fabric" (not just any landscape fabric) and topping with approximately six inches of granite dust or gravel. This writer prefers granite dust because it relieves the worry of stones (gravel) getting caught between their hooves. Most goats run for cover the second a drop of rain hits them – If the herd does not have enough room in the shelter and there is 'standing room only', well, that can be dangerous and the probable time for injuries to occur. Rains that come after a drought can cause nitrates to build up in forages, thereby making grazing dangerous. Be sure your goats have access to good quality hay (as a buffer for the rumen) before letting them out to graze.

EXTREME TEMPERATURE FLUCTUATIONS – Cold to warm and vice versa can cause dehydration and stress. Dehydration, if not caught early, can be life threatening. The only way to get enough fluids into a goat that is not drinking on its own is via a stomach tube. If you have never stomach-tubed a grown goat and would like to learn how, you can learn that at the Colossal Goat Field Day in April. Many producers, when they find an animal down, often overlook that the animal is dehydrated, but instead look for another cause for the problem. Drastic temperature changes cause stress – if a doe is pregnant, you can probably count on her kidding then – and probably in the worst place possible.

HEAT – Heat causes stress and dehydration. If shade and/or shelter and clean water are not provided and not easily accessible, the animal is a good candidate for a heat stroke.

WINDY – Many producers overlook wind as something to be concerned about, however, a windy day can wreak havoc on a herd – if it is cold, some of the young and the mature ones not in optimum health can drop their body core temperature. If adequate shelters are not available, the producer needs to keep a vigilant watch for related problems.

Just be mindful that goats need to live simply, have lots of room, shelter from severe weather (strong winds, rain, extreme cold), fresh clean water, adequate forage, hay and minerals. They are forage animals and we constantly force them to be grazers. This makes them less adaptable and more dependent on producers.

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