

TWELVE WAYS TO KEEP SHEEP/GOATS HEALTHY. 1-5

1- Feed forage-first balanced rations

Most of the nutritional requirements of sheep/goats can be met with forage: pasture, browse, range, hay, and/or ensilage. As ruminants, forage (fibrous plant material) is their most natural diet; thus, fewer health problems are usually encountered. At the same time, don't be afraid to supplement rations with concentrates and other feedstuffs. Higher producing animals (e.g., lactating females and growing lambs/kids) usually require supplementation to meet their production needs. Don't forget free choice minerals (needs vary) for grazing animals.

If you're not sure what to feed your sheep/goats, do the math! Balance their rations. You need to know the weight of your animals and the weight and nutritional composition of your feedstuffs to do this. Spreadsheets and ration balancing software can help with the task.

3 - Regularly body condition score your animals to make sure you are meeting their nutritional needs. Aim to maintain animals between body condition scores of 2 and 4 (out of 5). Body condition score (BCS) is also a good indicator of parasite infection (in adults) and overall health. It can be used to determine market and breeding readiness, too.



5 – Routinely monitor your sheep/goats for signs of internal parasitism and other diseases. It is recommended that sheep/goats not be regularly dewormed. Instead, they should be monitored for clinical signs of parasitism and dewormed only when necessary. Use FAMACHA® and/or the Five Point Check® (and other criteria) to make deworming decisions. Always dose orally with drench formulations. Consider adding a coccidiostat to the feed and/or mineral. Take temperatures before giving antibiotics. Normal rectal temperature is 101.5-103.5°F. Don't use antibiotics to treat viral diseases or cover up poor hygiene/husbandry. Follow the advice of your veterinarian when giving antibiotics and/or other drugs.



2 - Manage like with like

Separate animals with different requirements. Nutritional requirements vary by species, breed, size, sex, age, climate, activity, and stage and level of production. Don't make little animals compete with big ones, young ones mingle and compete with older ones. Pregnant females should be kept separate from lactating females; males away from females. Feed and manage pregnant ewe lambs/doelings separately to ensure successful outcomes. If you can't separate them, don't breed ewe lambs/doe kids until they are yearlings.



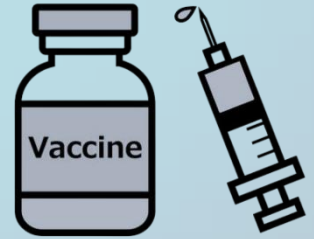
4 – Observe your sheep/goats' hooves for signs of disease and excess growth. Trim hooves as needed, but not overzealously. The need for hoof trimming usually varies from every few months to never, with yearly probably being most common. Cull animals with excess and unnatural hoof growth. Don't bring footrot onto your farm!



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6 - Vaccinate for the appropriate diseases

While the only universally recommended vaccination for sheep/goats is clostridial diseases (CDT or multi-variant), it might be wise to vaccinate for other diseases depending upon your situation and risk. Some vaccines should not be given unless the disease is already present on your farm, e.g., sore mouth, foot rot and caseous lymphadenitis. Don't use vaccines approved for other species unless prescribed by your veterinarian.



7 - Select for hardiness and disease resistance

Cull animals that require frequent deworming, hoof trimming, or other interventions. Don't "baby" your animals. Make them do what they are supposed to, i.e., take care of their offspring, get up and nurse on their own. Don't rely on heat lamps or put coats on lambs/kids that don't need them. Feed properly so your animals can withstand the elements and fight disease.

8 - Select the right animals for your environment and production system. Species and breeds vary in their adaptability to specific climates and production systems. Some do better in cold climates; some hot. Some are better suited to humid and/or high rainfall areas and vice versa. Buy your foundation stock from farms that raise animals similarly to how you do (or plan to). Don't expect animals raised with heavy feeding to do as well in extensive production systems.



9 - Provide enough space and ventilation when animals are housed. While housing needs vary by climate and production system, the need for air movement does not. Poor ventilation can lead to many health problems, especially respiratory. Take advantage of natural ventilation. Prevent drafts, but don't close barns up too tightly. Make sure there is sufficient feeder space and access to water. Ideally, don't mix horned and polled animals. Provide shelter or shelter breaks to grazing animals. Make sure there's no vegetation in dry lot areas.

10 - Practice good biosecurity and hygiene. Limit traffic and maintain a (mostly) closed flock/herd. Quarantine all new animals. Deworm them (with multiple drug classes) to prevent introduction of resistant worms. Check hooves to prevent introduction of foot rot. Trim and treat hooves as necessary. Keep feeders and water receptacles clean. Keep barns properly bedded (clean and dry on top). Don't overstock pens and lots. Eliminate hot spots on pasture.

11 - Establish a Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship. You need a veterinarian to obtain and use antibiotics and other prescription medications. Only a veterinarian is legally allowed to use or prescribe drugs extra label. Both are usually necessities for profitable sheep/goat farming. A good small ruminant veterinarian is invaluable.



12 - Minimize stress

Recognize the sources of stress in your flock/herd. Keep non-working dogs away from your animals. Use low stress livestock handling techniques. Work sheep/goats slowly, gently and quietly. Take advantage of their natural behaviors. Minimize the stress of weaning and transportation. Don't stress animals before slaughter. Consider providing environmental enrichment such as climbing platforms, scratching posts, brushes, etc.. Allow group interaction when feasible.

