

Neonatal Losses

A significant number of lambs and kids die before weaning, with estimates ranging from 10 to 30 percent. This represents a significant loss of income to sheep and goat producers. A vast majority of these losses occur during the first week, especially the first 24 hours. Leading causes of mortality are starvation, hypothermia, and infectious diseases. Predators also account for significant mortality on some farms and ranches. Stillborns (lambs/kids that never took a breath) are also lost potential. Neonatal losses need to be identified and quantified so that action can be taken to eliminate or reduce future losses.



Causes of neonatal loss

- Difficult birth (dystocia)
- Low birth weight
- Congenital defects
- Poor maternal nutrition
- Poor mothering (abandonment)
- Starvation
- Hypothermia
- Infectious disease, especially diarrhea and respiratory
- Weather extremes
- Inadequate shelter
- Predation

Preventing neonatal losses

- Change birthing season
- Modify environment
- Change management practices
- Lamb/kid inside
- Jug dams and offspring
- Improve ventilation
- Dry, draft-free environment
- Adequate colostrum intake
- Health program, e.g., vaccination
- Hygiene
- Biosecurity
- Genetics (e.g., crossbreeding)
- Predator control