



FACTSHEET

Reproduction

Pregnancy diagnosis

Pregnancy diagnosis can be carried out in sheep and goats from 45-60 days gestation using trans abdominal ultrasound. Pregnancy diagnosis is done to determine the number of fetuses present and barren ewes. Barren ewes should be removed from the breeding stock and ewes should be separated into 3 groups according to fetal numbers, to enable appropriate nutrition during pregnancy.

Lambing/kidding

Lambing/kidding can be a stressful time. It is important to be well prepared and have appropriate equipment to hand. Plastic arm length gloves, lubricant, ropes and a clean lambing pen are essential requirements.

Normal labour is divided into 3 stages:

Stage 1 – the water bag appears, the ewe's cervix begins to dilate and contractions begin

Stage 2 – the fetus is delivered

Stage 3 – the placenta is delivered

If the ewe/doe is experiencing difficulty lambing/kidding then they may require veterinary intervention and possibly a caesarian section.

Indications for a caesarian section include ring womb (failure of the cervix to fully dilate), fetal oversize, malpresentation of the fetuses or other maternal factors.

Other problems that may occur during pregnancy or at lambing/kidding are briefly listed below:

Vaginal prolapse

Usually occurs in the last 3 weeks of pregnancy. The vagina and cervix protrude through the vulva of the ewe and the ewe is often seen straining. In worse case scenarios the cervical and vaginal tissue can become damaged and may even rupture leading to death. A vaginal prolapse needs to be replaced as soon as possible ideally with veterinary intervention. The ewe should be given adequate pain relief and not used for future breeding as this is a condition that will occur in future pregnancies.

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Uterine prolapse

This occurs after lambing/kidding and is an emergency. The whole of the uterus prolapses from the vulva of the ewe. Veterinary attention is required immediately in order to replace the prolapse and prevent further damage. The normal cause is a prolonged labour with oversized lambs. There is no reason to cull affected ewes as this condition doesn't always occur at subsequent lambings. The ewe must be given adequate antibiotic cover and pain relief.

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