K-STATE Research and Extension | Wildcat District

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No Kidding? How to Confirm Pregnancy in Small Ruminants

Falling leaves, cooler weather, and the strong smell of bucks in rut (if you raise goats, you know what I'm talking about) meet me when I walk out the door to do morning chores. All signs of fall, and with fall comes breeding season for goats and sheep in hopes of spring kids and lambs.

While one can often tell by looking at a doe/ewe if she is pregnant when it gets closer to her due date, sometimes it is more desirable to confirm if a doe/ewe is bred closer to the breeding date. Blood testing or an ultrasound are the two options for pregnancy testing sheep/goats.

A blood test to detect pregnancy requires taking a blood sample and sending it to a lab for testing, or there is a new "at home" pregnancy test available for livestock that uses a blood sample. Several labs offer pregnancy testing for small ruminants, and the test usually costs less than $5 per animal, making it a very cost-effective option. Blood samples can be taken 28 days after breeding, and test results have been found to be 90% accurate.

Having an ultrasound done is usually more expensive than a blood test because you have the cost of the ultrasound machine or the expense of paying a vet to ultrasound your herd. However, ultrasounds allow estimation of how far along a doe/ewe is (if a breeding date is not known) and how many kids/lambs she is carrying. Ultrasounds can be performed 45 days after breeding to confirm pregnancy, with 98% accuracy (when performed by an experienced person).

Confirming if does and ewes are bred early in gestation can be a cost-saving management practice when compared to the cost of feeding open does/ewes through the winter. If you "pen breed" (turn a buck/ram in with the does/ewes for a couple of months) and are not sure when or if the does/ewes were bred, using a marking harness or marking paint on the buck/ram can help identify which does/ewes have been bred and changing the color of marker used about every 18 days can help identify which does/ewes where bred a second time to give a better estimate of when they are due to kid/lamb in the spring. If you decide to confirm the does/ewes are bred by blood test or ultrasound, it is recommended to do so after the buck/ram has been taken out.

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