

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact: Adaven Rohling
Diversified Agriculture and Natural Resource Agent, Wildcat Extension District
adaven@ksu.edu, (620) 331-2690

Weaning Sheep & Goats

Before we know it, it will be time to wean spring lambs and kids. The recommended weaning age for sheep and goats is two to three months old because this is when their rumen is fully developed, and they no longer need to consume milk. Weaning is a significant change for sheep and goats and can be stressful for both mothers and lambs/kids, but there are ways to make it a little less stressful. Fence line weaning, where lambs/kids are in a separate pen but share a fence with their mom, is one method that helps reduce stress by making it possible for kids/lambs to be separated from their mom but still see her. However, some kids and lambs can be escape artists, so double-check your fence to make sure kids/lambs can't sneak back into their mom's pen.

Before weaning, ensure lambs/kids eat forage (hay and grass) and grain well and have been started on the feed they will be fed after weaning. This will help them transition better to a diet without milk and reduce the stress of switching to a new diet.

When animals are stressed, it is crucial to watch for signs of sickness, as stress can weaken the immune system. Signs to watch for to identify a sick sheep/goat include not coming up to eat or not eating as much as usual, separating themselves from the herd, standing "hunched up" and looking like they are cold when the weather is warm, coughing, running nose, raspy/labored breathing, holding their tail down - for goats, acting lethargic - not alert. If you notice these signs, catch the animal and take its temperature (normal temp. for goats and sheep is 101-103). Knowing the animal's temperature will help determine how to treat them.

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