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Managing Internal Parasites in Sheep & Goats

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Spring and summer are critical management periods for sheep and goat producers, with the warmer weather and increased rainfall making the perfect combination for internal parasites to thrive. This is also the time of year when spring lambs and kids are weaned, a stressful time for kids and lambs when they are more susceptible to internal parasites.

Parasites will thrive and develop on a pasture when there has been at least two inches of rainfall and the temperature is at least 50°F. This makes spring and summer the ideal time for parasites to thrive and develop in southeast Kansas, and makes internal parasites available to sheep and goats that are grazing. Because of this sheep and goat producers are continually fighting a battle against internal parasites. To get ahead and prevent serious internal parasites issues in your herd, it is important to routinely monitor your herd and treat animals showing signs of being effected by internal parasites, also referred to as parasitism.

In the early stages of parasitism, sheep and goats will appear unthrifty even though they are being fed an adequate level of nutrition for their stage of growth or reproduction, it will be difficult to get goats and sheep to gain weight. As the amount of internal parasites a sheep or goat has continues to increase, they will appear to be weak or listless. They will be slow getting up and may need to be encouraged to stand. In more severe cases in sheep the wool will develop tender spots in the fibers and may begin to slip off and in goats their hair may become course. Goats and sheep will also loose body condition and become very thin. While scouring caused by internal parasites is not seen very often in adult animals, lambs and kids often begin to scour when they have a large amount of internal parasites. The color of the inner eyelid is also an indication of internal parasites, specifically barber pole worms. When the eyelid appears pale pink to white in color, it is a sign of anemia and indicates the animal is overburdened with barber pole worms. A condition referred to as “bottle jaw” can also occur and is an indication of a heavy barber pole worm load. When bottle jaw occurs, the loose tissues under the jaw and tongue fill with fluid and become swollen.

One of the best ways to prevent parasitism in sheep and goats is to monitor your herd for signs of internal parasite buildup on a routine basis. This can be done by taking fecal samples and doing a fecal flotation examination to determine the type and number of eggs present. Taking samples routinely, every thirty to forty-five days, will help monitor parasitism in the herd and a warning can be given when parasite eggs show up or evidence of increased parasitism is indicated in the feces, and will be the quickest method to confirm physical symptoms. However, prevention through routine monitoring and deworming as needed is the best preventative tool available. There are many methods available to producers for treating internal parasites. Oral drenching is the most common method used. Deworming through feed, drinking water, injectable, and paste dewormers are additional treatment methods. Producers should consult their veterinarian for recommendations on the use of these products. Only a limited number of deworming products have been approved for use in the sheep and goat industry.

When checking your herd each month for signs of internal parasites routine management practices such as vaccinations and trimming hooves can also be incorporated to make a more efficient use of your time. Pasture management also plays a key role in preventing serious parasites problems, avoid overstocking pastures and rotate pastures regularly.

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