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## **Pregnancy Testing for Small Ruminants**

Falling leaves, cool 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.

A lot of planning, time, and care go into the arrival of kids/lambs, making spring an exciting (and maybe stressful) time for sheep and goat producers. 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.

Doing a blood test to detect pregnancy requires taking a blood sample and sending it to a lab to be tested. Several labs offer pregnancy testing for small ruminants, and the test typically 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 from these samples have been found to have an accuracy of 90 percent.

Having an ultrasound done is usually more expensive than a blood test because it involves the cost of the ultrasound machine or the expense of paying a veterinarian to perform the ultrasound on your herd. However, ultrasounds give the option to estimate 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 done 45 days after breeding to confirm pregnancy and have an accuracy of ninety-eight percent (when done 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 were 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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