

Emergency First Aid on the Farm

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My inspiration for education articles comes from my own herd. They tend to be quite vocal and demonstrative about the topics that we all need for improving ourselves as goat farmers. My dear and stately Alpine doe, April, gave me the biggest nudge toward this newsletter's article. SHE BROKE HER LEG!!

Goats can get themselves into all sorts of odd difficulties. We are all well meaning in providing for our delightful creatures but stuff happens. It is best to be prepared for the worst and hope for the best. In the case of my poor doe, having basic first aid supplies on hand was a godsend. Having all of these supplies in one place would have been even better! I do keep my regular tending supplies for hoof trimming, worming etc in a bucket with pockets. It is portable albeit not goat proof. I doubt that anything is! I do keep emergency supplies on hand in the house but had never organized them in a manner that they would be ready and portable to take to a barnyard disaster of the sort that April was involved in. Here is my sad tale...

I was out working in my garden when I heard a scream. Not a goat caught in the fence kind of cry. It was a blood curdling shriek of epic proportions. I found her at the feeder with her leg stuck. When I got close enough to assess the situation, I found that I was looking at jagged bone. Oh no, an open fracture! A break is bad enough but to have bone exposed to the environment of the barnyard was chilling. Luckily she was calm once I arrived and so I could take a deep breath and take an even closer look. The injury was actually involving her femur or upper front leg with the rest of the leg rotated 180 degrees. This meant that I not only had to get her leg out but I would have to turn the rest of the leg around to the anatomically correct position! Home alone, dang it. April and I managed to extricate and realign her leg. No longer hampered by the feeder, she stood and hopped off on three legs with the injured one dangling. She started to bleed. Now some of you might think that I ran for the house to get the rifle. That entered my mind briefly but the surprising thing was that she didn't seem to be in pain. I ran to the house instead for splinting materials. I returned to the barn with a clean dishtowel and a roll of vet wrap. It was easy to apply and provided support for the bone and pressure to stop the bleeding. When my husband returned, we cleansed the wound and put on a cardboard splint. We moved her to a small enclosure with clean bedding and her best buddy for company. Pain still didn't seem to be an issue for her. She ate her evening meal with gusto! To make a long story short, April is still with us. Five weeks later, her wound is healed. She can use her leg for a little balance and to paw straw. She is out into the main herd and has head butted her way back to her lead position. It still remains to be seen if she can stand for the buck and carry kids to term but given her courage and robustness, I am willing to give her a chance.

The old scout saying 'be prepared' should be the motto for all of us. I have a lot of experience in the field of emergency medicine that many of you out there haven't had the good fortune to be exposed to. I encourage you to obtain a basic first aid book to have on

your farms for reference. Emergency care for humans is not that different than it is for farm animals. We are all mammals with some slight differences in anatomy. This basic book will give you a good idea on the items to have on hand. You don't have to spend a lot of money on supplies. My dish towel was great as the first splint. Cardboard is easy to find, hopefully in your recycle bin, but odd pieces of sticks or other building materials such as pvc pipe can be worked into splints. Vet tape, that brightly colored self adhering bandage, is invaluable. Dressings can be fashioned out of things that you already have in the house. One of the cheapest and most absorbent materials to have on hand is a box of sanitary napkins. They hold together in the worst of bloody disasters. Hydrogen peroxide is wonderful for cleaning up wounds. Triple antibiotic ointment is available as well as a plethora of salves and ointments that you can find at the feed store. I have found the product 'Wonder Dust' to be very useful for coating wounds to keep out dirt and flies. I am also going to repeat an oft said reminder. Have an ongoing relationship with a veterinarian. Find one that is willing to work with you. Most of these fine professionals are far too busy to respond to all of the problems that we have and will welcome a farmer in their practice that is willing to learn and be able to follow instructions. I use a clinic that treats both small and large animals so that I cover all of the bases. They will advise you on the use of antibiotics, when needed. April is alive because of my ability to dose her in the proper way. I am going to follow my own advice and put together a portable box with essential first aid supplies. I hope that the rest of you do the same. Stick that dog eared, well read first aid book in the box and you too can have the ability to help out a goat in distress.

This brings me to another topic that we all should consider as we move into the summer months. Our goats are very hardy animals. Even though they have evolved in some very harsh environments, this doesn't mean that they can survive when they lack the basic necessities in the heat and glaring sun. It is humane to provide shelter in the form of shade for our animals. Heat exhaustion and heat stroke can occur in any species. Lethargic animals should be a warning to you in very hot temperatures that your animals are stressed. It can be as simple as setting up a sprinkler for them to cool under to avoid disaster. They must have clean water to drink. Staking a goat out is a dangerous practice even when you leave them with the necessities. They can quickly get themselves in a situation that will not allow them to reach these amenities. We all know that exposure to the sun for a long period of time is harmful. Skin cancer is becoming a common malady. Goats have fur coats that protect but during the summer months this natural covering becomes very thin. Ears, nose and under the tail have no protection at all. Oh no, this crazy lady is going to suggest that we start applying SPF 15 daily!?! Not. But it is important to keep an eye on your goats for any sign of sores that are not healing. Insects become a real irritant to us all as the summer progresses. Make sure to put up fly and yellow jacket traps as well as watching for nests. A sting here and there in most goats will not be a problem but a curious caprine can be swarmed and stung repeatedly which could lead to major problems. Prevention is best. I have not used any repellent on my goats in the past but some years are worse than others and you might consider giving them a spray of pyrethrin. We delouse but sometimes don't think about the misery of the summer insect explosion for our animals.

Thanks for letting me ramble on about my passion. I hope that our lovely friends are your passion as well. Enjoy your summer!!

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