

Feed Induced Iodine Deficiency

OMGP Education Article April 2007

I received a call last week from a very nice but bewildered gentleman from near Omak, WA. He was upset and rightly so. This was his first kidding experience. His does were well fed with access to the appropriate mineral supplements. The majority of his kids were born without hair and with goiters. A goiter is a swelling of the thyroid gland. The most common cause for this is lack of iodine in the diet. I scratched my head while I asked questions and got out my trusty veterinarian text. This farmer was quite knowledgeable about the kinds of things that he fed his does. Mind you, they appeared hale and hearty. After doing a bit of reading we came up with the possible cause of this tragedy. The hay that he had purchased was touted as quite good for goats. It was liberally laced with mustard. The weed kind, not out of a bottle. His goats loved it. He also was able to get bags of soybeans at low cost. His goats loved that, too. Both of these items are listed as 'goitrogenic'. This means that they can cause decrease in the uptake of iodine by the thyroid gland. The most common plants that produce antithyroid compounds include the mustard family (e.g. kale, rape and others in the brassica family), the legume family (e.g. peanuts, soybeans, white clover), the prune family (e.g. cherries, apricots), and some grains (e.g. sorghum). I would suspect that nibbles of these substances are probably not highly harmful but when fed in the situation that the goat has no choice then problems arise. These substances can also cause the does to have difficulty becoming pregnant. It may seem that this is an isolated incident. It makes one wonder when a farmer has an unhealthy crop of kids if it is caused by an inadvertent exposure to toxic plants or substances. I had a poor crop of kids last year. I had taken in a stool sample and was told by the vet to give Valbazon. I was issued the medication plus instructions on dosage for my herd. We discussed the fact that I had pregnant does and was reassured that as long as they were not in the first month of gestation that it would be okay. I had numerous spontaneous miscarriages as well as stunted kids as a result. We really need to be asking what is in our feeds, wormers and any supplements that we use to make sure that we are not doing harm. It is important that we are aware of what our goats are browsing on. Wild cherries are common in the area that I reside in and at certain times of the year that lovely yellow haze in the field could be mustard in bloom. Some goat farmers are hiring out their herds to clean up fields etc. for a bit of free feed. I would suggest a good understanding of what those noxious-to-goats plants are and walk the field before letting your precious animals out. I think that it is also important to walk about your yard. Do you have a lot of landscaping? Do you know if any of those plants are toxic? Azaleas and rhododendrons are quite popular in Northwest gardens. They are very toxic to goats. There is not enough room in this newsletter to list all that could be harmful but at least this gives you a little bit of a start in knowing the importance of what your goats are eating and to avoid the sadness that this farmer in Omak is feeling right now.