

Labor and Delivery

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My husband, Larry, and I attended the Fall Pen Sale in Prineville last weekend. Despite the fact that some of the sellers went home with their goats, it was a wonderful opportunity to meet other farmers, share ideas and learn. Some of you took the time to fill out evaluation forms and all of these were read and discussed at the 'after meeting'. One of the common requests was for more seminars. We were blessed with the wonderful presentation by Mia Nelson who shared her knowledge of forage management and gave a well attended demonstration of her temporary fencing. Next year I will be making sure that we have a crowded schedule of opportunities to learn throughout the day. The venue is a large arena and it can accommodate a crowd. Let's all work toward filling it up next year with goats, friends, sales and learning.

Now for the November topic of kidding. Hopefully all of your does are in good shape with their internal parasites well managed. You have met the balance between too thin and too fat. You have clean areas for your does to kid in and supplies in for the blessed events. So now let's talk about the kidding process itself.

The most important thing to remember is that Mother Nature has been in charge for a long time. The fact that we breed for a type of goat that will grow fast and carry a lot of meat on it's frame can throw a wrench in the works. Keep this in mind as your does deliver so that when it comes time to cull you can recall those that had problems with their kidding process.

Counting the days from exposure to the buck to actual kidding is usually 147-155 days. This will vary from doe to doe but it's said that each doe is usually close to her own particular timing in each subsequent year so, again, keeping records will help in the long run. Another aspect of predicting a doe's time to go into labor is inspection of the udder. Some does will bag up early on and others will wait until their labor has begun. This would seem like something you wouldn't want to leave to the last minute but those bags are usually ready when the kids are. This is usually a consistent sign in particular does.

A doe will usually show signs of restlessness, decreased appetite and the propensity to be off by herself. First time kidders may not have a clue about what is happening to them and won't follow the 'rules' but most behave in this manner. There may be a clear or cloudy discharge from the vulva which may also be blood tinged. The vulva is somewhat swollen as well. You may notice the area around the tail has sunken. I try at this point to move a doe into a more secluded and clean area that has lights so that I can keep an eye on her. Depending on when you are able to notice that something is up will be a factor in how long you think this first part of labor actually is. This is called early labor and involves contractions of the muscles that make up the uterus and also softening and

dilating of the cervix. The doe will spend time walking around, preparing a bed and actually lying down to rest. It's worthwhile at this point to have fresh, warmed water laced with molasses or some sort of electrolyte solution. This whole process is a lot of work!

The second stage of labor is the active part where the doe really gets down and starts pushing out those kids. You should see a dilation of the vulva and also increased watery discharge with some blood. The first object to present is usually a hoof. This will be white and soft. Most often another hoof will emerge as the doe pushes and then the nose and head. This is when you breathe a sigh of relief as all is as it should be. The rest of the body will follow quickly as the head is the largest. Please remember that this is a natural process and it is not necessary to help the doe by pulling on the kid. Save this intervention for when it is actually needed! You can damage the kid and the doe. If the doe will let you, cleaning of the nose of the kid before the body is delivered will help it to have less trouble with it's first birth. Occasionally the sac that encases the kid in the uterus is still intact. It's okay to tear this if you want. Most does will be calling to the kid. After the kid does some sneezing, coughing and sputtering, it will call back. You will notice that the umbilical cord is still connected. This will thin and tear away as the doe moves around to start cleaning her kid. This stimulation is important for the kid and also helps to get the goo off so that the fur can fluff and start keeping the kid's body heat in. You can help with this process too if allowed by mom. If the doe has more kids to birth she may turn at this point and go back down to push again. Repeat the process! Most times the kids are up and rooting for the teat. I try to head them in the right direction but let them do the rest. If a kid is too weak to get up and head for the udder it may just be tired so give it some time to recover before you interfere. Most will find the udder in due time. If this is a first time doe, I sometimes will keep bringing the kids to her head so that she realizes that there is more than one. When mom is done either move her and her kid(s) to cleaner, dryer quarters or provide dry bedding so that none stay wet and become hypothermic. Make sure that any receptacles filled with water are shallow and placed in a way that the kids cannot get into them. I was amazed how easily a kid that is only a couple of days old can jump up and into a bucket or tank!!

The third stage of labor is the passing of the placenta. This sometimes takes awhile, like hours depending on how vigorous the kids are at nursing. Aside from the need for colostrums, this stimulation helps the uterus continue to contract to expel the afterbirth. If this is retained, infection will occur. Once the placenta is delivered, throw it out. It will act as a welcoming mat for predators and not all of the does are willing to clean up the mess.

So, that is my rendition of a normal kidding. Things can go wrong. It's Murphy's Law. The most common problem will be an abnormal presentation of the kid in the birth canal. Kids can be born breech. This means backwards or butt first. If the butt and tail present it can still be an okay birth but if you just get rear legs, it's a big problem as the head is way up there still. This will mean that the umbilical cord will likely separate before the kid can begin to breathe. Not good. This is when it's wise to hurry the process along a bit. Also, these breech births often leave the kid with far more debris to inhale especially

if the chest delivers but the head is not out yet. This can result in an aspiration pneumonia. These kids should be held upside down while you allow gravity to drain fluids from it's lungs and upper airway. Sometimes a kid can be coming out in the right way but get a leg back or even the head turned around. This is when that hot soapy water comes in handy. Gloves are best with sterile lubricant, like K-Y Jelly but I find that I can feel landmarks a whole lot better with no gloves. You may have to pull something round to help the process but if at all possible, don't pull. The exception to this is the breech when the chest is out. It's a good idea if you have not done this before to have a picture of the kid inside the doe so that you can put the feel with the picture.

Above all, get a hold of a good goat book, call a goat friend if they are kidding first to get an eye witness accounting. Always remember that our goats are hardy and will do just fine if they have shelter, food and nice molasses water.

Hope to see you all at the annual dinner!!!!!!

Linda DeHart, Vice President OMGP