Improving understanding of health issues in goats

A wide variety of issues faced by dairy and pet goats were discussed at the Goat Veterinary Society meeting on 2nd November.

The Goat Veterinary Society autumn meeting and AGM was held at Taunton racecourse. David Harwood (chairman) reported that the Society has prepared a positioning paper on antibiotic use and resistance in goats, which is available on request. Closer links with the Sheep Veterinary Society have been developed to consider topics of mutual interest. An update of the BVD incident with imported cattle was presented and delegates were urged to seek details of clarification from APHA. Experiences with the management of TB testing for goats have been collated and information is available on the GVS website.

Veterinary surgeons are requested to indicate their use of analgesia in goats; a short, confidential questionnaire is available from Ben Dunstan (honorary secretary) at: bencowvet@gmail.com. The Milking Goat Association (www.milkinggoat.org.uk) has been established to further the interests of this expanding industry group.

Hoof health
A recorded presentation from New Zealand, by Laura Deeming (Massey University), provided an update of her hoof health PhD project involving the Dairy Goat Cooperative, with 72 herds supplying milk for infant formula from 45,000 goats.

Grass is grown all year round, is cut and carried to the herd and comprises 75% of the milking goat diet. The animals are bedded down on wood shavings. Concentrate nuts are fed in the milking parlour and the goats run from the barn to the parlour and from the parlour to the barn. Running goats do not appear to be lame and the incidence of lameness in a herd is greatly underestimated by farm managers. Lame goats lie down longer, eat less and produce less milk. It is important to identify all levels of lameness, not just the severe cases, with early intervention offering a better chance of recovery.

The stages of lameness are recognised as normal, mild, moderate and severe; detecting the cases between normal and mild is the challenge. These goats exhibit an uneven gait, which is detectable before limping, with shorter strides, slightly stiff joints and inward or outward swinging of the hoof. Hoof lesions are related to wet shavings from liquid dung, due to the grass diet.

Over-feeding of a total mixed ration has led to laminitis. Hoof wall separation is recorded.

The project is examining infra-red images of hooves for inflammation and x-rays, before and after trimming, with a first trim at five months of age compared to 13 months. Photographs of legs show the standing position, shape of the hoof and weight distribution. Hoof health and lameness is seen as one of the biggest problems for dairy goats and early life management has long-term impacts.

Urolithiasis in pygmy goats
The Society is inclusive of the whole spectrum of goat-keeping and James Adams (RVC) discussed the issues with urolithiasis in pet pygmy goats. The development of stones is due to trauma, infection and/or limited access to water. Infections lead to an increase in pH in the bladder and lack of urination causes muco-proteins to accumulate. Bullied goats are not happy to stand and urinate. The speaker emphasised that goats do not need good grass or a grain-based diet and the availability of rain water is better than high-calcium mains water.

Small male goats suffer from trapped stones within the S-shaped sigmoid flexure behind the testicles while large goats suffer stones nearer to the prepuce. Early signs are bloating, being off food, failure to urinate and outstretching of the body. A pygmy goat has a small bladder (5cm).

Tube cystostomy can be successful, but it is necessary to keep the tube clear of mucus. A poor prognosis can be anticipated with small goats that have a stone in the urethra and also goats with an excessively high creatinase reading. Larger goats have a better prognosis, but surgery needs to take place within two days. The advice to veterinary surgeons considering surgery is ‘don’t sit on it’.

Poisoning by plants
Nicola Bates highlighted the experience of the Veterinary Poisons Information Service, which has records of 272 goat