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The Five-Point Check

Spring is here and with it comes warm weather and (hopefully) rain, making the perfect combination for parasites to grow and thrive. This can make spring and summer a more challenging time for goat and sheep producers to control internal parasites in their herds. As we start to wean spring kids and lambs it is a good opportunity to take a closer look at them and their mothers to treat any that show signs of internal parasites.

When treating sheep and goats for internal parasites it is recommended to only treat animals that are showing signs of internal parasites to help slow down parasites building resistance to dewormers. A common method of determining if small ruminants need to be dewormed is using the Five-Point Check in combination with Famancha scoring. Famancha scoring is a system that looks for signs of barber pole worms by looking at the color of the lower, inner eyelid and grading this color on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being ideal (eyelid color is red) and 5 being severe (eyelid color is white). If the animal has a Famancha score of 4 or above (eyelid color is light pink to white) it needs to be treated for barber pole worms. The five-point check method includes evaluating the five areas of listed below.

Jaw – “Bottle jaw” is a symptom of barber pole worms. Not to be confused for a milk goiter, bottle jaw is buildup of fluid right under the jaw. Small ruminants that have bottle jaw should always be dewormed.

Back – Goats and sheep that have a body condition score of two or less should be dewormed especially if they have lost weight or the color of their eyelid is light pink or white. Body condition is a scoring system that evaluates the amount of fat cover over the back, between the back of the rib change and hips. It is scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being skinny and 4 being obese.

Hair Coat – If sheep are losing wool or goats have a coarse, dull hair coat these can be signs of internal parasites inhibiting nutrient absorption.

Tail – Look at the tail to see if the animal has or has recently had diarrhea. Many parasites can cause diarrhea.

Nose – A snotty nose can be a sign of nasal bots. Nasal bots are caused by a fly that lays eggs in the nasal passage.

Only small ruminants that show signs of internal parasites by Famancha score and the Five-Point Check should be treated for internal parasites. Different kinds of dewormers treat different parasites, be sure to use a dewormer that is labeled to treat the type(s) of parasite the animal is showing signs of having. To effectively treat animals and help slow parasite resistance, make sure to follow the dosage instructions on the label.

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