UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Small Ruminant Update

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Limiting Weaning Stress in the Small Ruminant Herd

Cassidy Dossin

Weaning can be one of the most stressful periods in the life of a kid or lamb. Small ruminant producers should plan to cut down weaning stress as much as possible to reduce disease susceptibility and maximize animal growth and productivity.

Weaning is the process of lambs and kids stopping to nurse from their mothers. Producers can go about this in several different ways. Some producers prefer to wean early and take the opportunity to put more weight on their lambs and kids with grain and hay as soon as they can; kids and lambs can more efficiently receive nutrition from grain and hay than they do from their mothers' milk. Early weaning typically takes place when lambs and kids are 60 days old and around 45 lbs, however, weaning can be attained even earlier if producers plan and prepare accordingly. Lambs and kids can be weaned as early as 30 to 45 days old; this is often the goal for producers who provide lambs and kids with milk replacer. Early weaning allows producers to breed back ewes and does more quickly.

Other producers prefer a more natural weaning process and leave lambs and kids on pasture with their mothers until they are 4 to 6 months old. This minimizes the stress on the young, but also means less weight gain. Producers have options when it comes to weaning method, but all producers should have a plan that works best with their operation and resource availability.

Planning for weaning starts with a healthy gestation period for does and ewes. Bred ewes and does should receive adequate nutrition to support a healthy gestation and produce colostrum, the first milk produced for the young, which is crucial for boosting immune systems of lambs and kids.

Lambs and kids should be vaccinated, dewormed, castrated, ear-tagged, and in the case of some lambs, have their tails docked all ahead of weaning to minimize stress. Having all these stressful tasks out of the way will make weaning much easier on our lambs and kids.

First vaccinations should be given within the first month of a lamb or kid's life, with booster shots following 3 to 4 weeks later. Make sure you consult with your veterinarian to see what you should be vaccinating for in your herd or flock. If producers are unable to perform these tasks ahead of weaning, wait until several weeks after weaning as opposed to vaccinating, castrating, and tagging lambs and kids at the same time as weaning.

Preparations for weaning can also include altering the ewes or does' diets to reduce milk production. Start by removing grain from the diet and switch to a lower quality hay. A drop in protein and energy levels will decrease milk production, but precautions should be taking to ensure you are still meeting the needs of your herd or flock.

Creep feeding is the practice of providing supplemental feed to nursing lambs and kids utilizing a creep gate; lambs and kids are able to access the feed or forage while mature ewes and does are not. Creep feeding requires certain facilities to be put in place but can be a great way to expose lambs and kids to feed before weaning.

During the weaning process it is best to remove the ewes and does and leave lambs and kids in a pasture they are familiar with. Lambs will already know where to find feed and water, which will result in less stress and weight loss the first few days after weaning. If this is not possible, move lambs and kids with their mothers for a few weeks before removing the mothers.

Livestock should always be handled slowly and gently to minimize stress. Having a plan for weaning in place and following some simple steps to prepare can reduce stress for lambs and kids as well as ewes and does.

Cassidy Dossin is the Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent at Clay County.
Contact her at (904) 284-6355 or by email: cdossin@ufl.edu

Small Ruminant Connection Events: Fulfilling the Needs of Small Ruminant Producers in the Northeast District

Izabella Toledo

Recently, a group of agents from the UF/IFAS Northeast District held a Small Ruminant Connections event at the UF Sheep Unit. This series of events aim to provide producers with multiple opportunities to learn more about small ruminant topics, participate in trainings, and get certifications. On April 9th, 2022, twelve producers had the opportunity to get trained on how to use the FAMACHA card, practice on the sheep and become FAMACHA certified.

The FAMACHA certification is only available by trained and certified instructors, making it difficult to access for producers, thus, besides offering the certification to producers, the Small Ruminant Connections group aims at certifying more extension agents as instructors to fill a larger need identified by producers.

Future FAMACHA certification events are being planned for the second semester.

Dates will be announced soon!

Dr. Izabella Toledo is the Dairy Regional Specialized Agent of the Northeast District and Editor of the Small Ruminant Update Newsletter. Contact her at (352) 294-6987 or by email:izatol@ufl.edu

Breeding Season Preparedness

Catalina Cabrera

•Why is important?

Breeding season is the period where the females get pregnant. This period will determine when we have newborns in the ground. There are multiple benefits associated with preparing for breeding season a few months in advance. Ultimately, we want to make sure that all the females that we desire to breed, get pregnant with a male that carries our targeted genetics. Additionally, we want our lambs/kids to be born at the optimal time. We want healthy males, females, and newborns, thus, taking time to prepare for breeding season will play an important role on the health and production of the herd/flock.

•What determines the breeding season?

There are different factors that determine when your animals get bred, some, you may not be able to change but within the natural breeding period you can determine your optimal breeding season.

Seasonality: Small ruminants do not cycle year-round, but when the days start to get shorter. Usually from July to December with variation by breed and location.

Food availability: As part of your decision on when to breed you may want to consider the feed, weather, pasture and/or supplementation. Given that the availability/cost variations can be optimized.

Market: Likewise, whether you produce just for home consumption or to sell kids/lambs or milk, you may have a period during the year that you would like to target.

Length: Adjust your breeding season length to the period you will want lambing and kidding to take place

2-3 Months Before your Determined Breeding Season:

•How to prepare the male (s)?

Optimal body condition score (BCS): Males should enter breeding season with a BCS of 3-3.5 (score 1-5). Not too thin, not obese. You will have time to adjust their BCS .

Physical examination: Make sure that they are healthy, vaccinated, hoof trimmed, sheared and treated if needed (foot rot, parasitism)

Housing: Provide Shade

Breeding soundness Evaluation: At the minimum you should palpate testicles and make sure that they feel normal and symmetric. If possible, have their semen evaluated.

Replacements: you will have time to purchase and quarantine new animal/s if desired.

•How to prepare the females?

Remove from the herd/flock poor performers (bad udders, susceptible to parasites) and select replacements - quarantine if outsourced)

Evaluate health: FAMACHA score, BCS (ideal 3), hoofs, etc. Shear, treat and deworm if needed.

2 - 4 Weeks Before:

- **What are some other considerations?**

"Flush" the herd/flock: provide a high energy diet to optimize cyclicity and increase the crop. Use supplements or high-quality pasture.

Prepare the breeding season location: good shade, easy access to water, clean pasture/ barn.

Make sure you have the right male: female ratio.

Yearlings- 1:20 females

Mature males-1:40 females

Synchronized females- 1:5 -10 females

- **Should I use the ram/buck effect or hormones?**

If you are interested in accelerating the beginning of the breeding season, you can use prescribed hormones or the presence of a vasectomized or fence-separated male to stimulate the females to start cycling a couple of weeks earlier. Likewise, if you want to further narrow the window where the females get breed you can use one of those two methods to synchronize their heat.

During the breeding season:

- **How to monitor the breeding season?**

Visual observation: Often walk the area where you have your animals, make sure they all look healthy, and observe heat and mounting activity.

You can place a marking harness in your males with different colors to monitor that the females are being mounted and that all the males are able to mount.

Perform early pregnancy diagnosis via ultrasound or blood test. If less females than expected are pregnant you may still have time to intervene.

Dr. Catalina Cabrera is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Food Animal Reproduction and Medicine- Small Ruminant Extension Specialist at the College of Veterinary Medicine. Contact her by email at: lcabrerarocha@ufl.edu

Recipe Corner

Goat Milk Fudge

- 1 lb powdered sugar
- 1/2 cup cocoa
- 1/2 cup butter cut into small pieces
- 1/4 cup whole goat milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans or walnuts

Directions:

1. Grease an 8x8" square pan to hold fudge

2. Combine the sugar and cocoa in a large microwavable bowl, and make a well in the center.

3. Place cut-up butter and milk in the well– **do not stir!**

4. Microwave on high for 2 minutes and add the vanilla

5. Blend with a stick blender or mixer until smooth

6. Stir in the nuts and pour into the grease pan.

7. Refrigerate until firm (~30min), cut into squares and serve!

Upcoming Events

Walton County Extension Goat and Sheep Workshop

May 9th 4:00 pm
732 N 9th St. DeFuniak Springs

Topics to include:

- Parasite Mananagement
- Hand-on FAMACHA scoring training
- And more!

Registration required:
https://fb.me/e/1NjHitQEK

2022 University of Florida Ram Test & Sale

We invite you to participate in the **2022 University of Florida Ram Test and Sale.** We are very excited to continue this unique program and to work with sheep producers to quantify the desirable qualities of their rams. We hope that this program will provide value to your operation.

This program is designed to standardize environmental conditions in order to evaluate individual ram performance, provide a source of high-quality performance tested rams to producers, offer educational opportunities for the improvement of the industry, and facilitate networking among producers.

Important dates:

- May 1 Pre-registration deadline
- May 14 Rams arrive at UF Sheep Unit
- May 26 84-day gain test begins
- Aug 18 84-day gain test ends
- Sept 17 UF Ram Test Sale & Educational Program

Eligible rams must be born between 12/1/21 - 2/15/22 and weaned by 4/15/22.

We encourage you to consider consigning your rams to the **2022 UF Ram Test and Sale**. Please contact us for further information or to consign animals to this program. Rams must be pre-registered by May 1, 2022 in order to be enrolled in the program.

For full program details and registration visit our website.
https://animal.ifas.ufl.edu/smallruminant/ramtest/

Contact Us:

Jesse Savell
Research Admin Manager
(352) 494-3397
sanspur@ufl.edu

Clay Whitehead
Sheep Unit Manager
(904) 796-0441
jacobcwhitehead@ufl.edu

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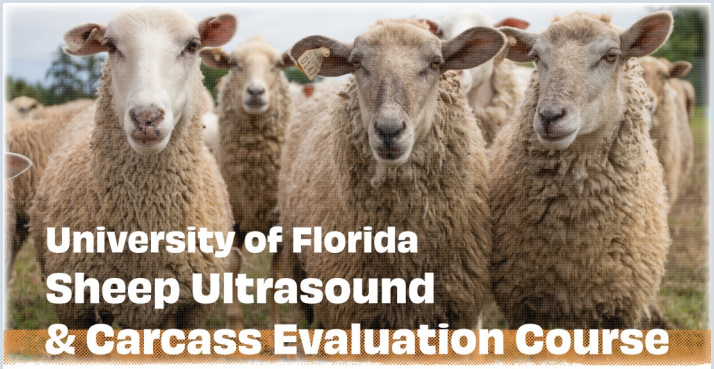
UF College of Veterinary Medicine UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA
Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences

Upcoming Events



University of Florida Sheep Ultrasound & Carcass Evaluation Course

Carcass ultrasound in sheep production can contribute to the advancement of the sheep industry through the determination of carcass traits. In this course you will **learn how to ultrasound three important carcass traits: loin eye area, loin depth, and rib fat.** These traits are highly inheritable and therefore, important when selecting breeding stock. Participants will have the opportunity to become a "certified scanner" for the Industry National Sheep Improvement Program.

This event is being organized by the UF Small Ruminant Extension Group and is hosted by the Animal Sciences Department and the school of Veterinary Medicine.
It will be taught by **Dr. Alison Crane** from Kansas State University.

Monday, May 23 - Wednesday, May 25
8:00 am - 5:00 pm
University of Florida Animal Sciences
2250 Shelay Drive
Gainesville, FL 32608
$350 per person, only 6 spots available!

For full program details and registration visit our website.
https://animal.ifas.ufl.edu/smallruminant/ultrasound

Contact Us:
Dr. Catalina Cabrera
Small Ruminant
Extension Specialist
lcabrerarocha@ufl.edu

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2022

SMALL RUMINANT PRODUCTION CONFERENCE

JUNE 9TH, 2022

UF/IFAS Extension Pasco County office
15029 14th St, Dade City, FL 33523
9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Topics include:
- Biosecurity for your farm
- Vaccinations protocols
- Weed identification
- Demonstrations
- Much more!

for more information visit the link
https://2022smallruminantconf.eventbrite.com

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Sheep and Goat Industry Development Project

UF IFAS UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Sheep and Goat Producer Survey

MEAT SHEEP ALLIANCE OF FLORIDA

The 'Sheep and Goat Industry Development Project' is a multidisciplinary research and extension initiative to assess the potential and challenges of the small ruminant industry in Florida. The overall goals of this project are (1) to assess production and market potential and identify strategies for organization of the production chain, (2) identify main challenges and strategies to improve the productivity of existing operations, and (3) establish a sire performance testing for small ruminants at the University of Florida, focusing on resistance to internal parasites.

We are collecting a second round of surveys! If you have not had the chance to participate yet, please do so! This information will help us better assist you in the future.

Check the QR code to access the survey. It is completely voluntary and should take about 15 minutes to complete, and your opinion is extremely valuable for us.

For more information, please reach out to us at *forages@ifas.ufl.edu* or contact your local extension agent.

The UF Small Ruminant Update Newsletter is published quarterly by the IFAS/ UF Extension, as an educational and informational service. Please address any questions to Izabella Toledo, the Dairy Regional Specialized Agent of the Northeast District and Editor of the Small Ruminant Update Newsletter. E-mail: izatol@ufl.edu