

So You Want to be a Goat Farmer

Choosing a herd veterinarian

One of the many questions people planning to raise goats often have is, “*Do I actually need a veterinarian?*”. The answer is yes! A veterinarian can help you develop protocols to help manage the health of your goats, like a vaccination program. There are also no drugs labeled for use in goats, so a veterinarian will help you determine which one to use, what dose to give, what duration length, and how long it will take for the meat and/or milk to be safe for human consumption following the treatment. Remember, you don’t have to just use the practice closest to your farm – it is perfectly acceptable for you to interview veterinarians until you find one that you can work well with and that has sufficient expertise in goats. Creating a successful relationship between veterinarian and producer takes work from both sides.

Veterinary-client-patient-relationship

A Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship (VCPR) is an ongoing working relationship between a client (the farmer), the herd veterinarian, and the animal patients (the goats). Veterinarians have extensive experience, knowledge, and training; something that cannot be matched by reading textbooks, talking to other producers, or researching online.

A VCPR is one of the most important parts of animal care. A valid VCPR means:

- That a licensed veterinarian is responsible for the medical judgments regarding the health of the livestock.
- That the veterinarian must have a working knowledge of the health status of the herd either from a physical examination of the animal(s) in question or from regular visits to the farm, and must be available for follow-up care if necessary.
- That the client, in turn, agrees to follow the veterinarian’s instructions.

By law, veterinarians cannot diagnose, treat, or dispense medications if a VCPR does not exist. VCPRs are especially important to goat producers as there are no drugs approved for use in goats, which means there are no labelled meat or milk withdrawal times for goats. As such, extra-label drug use (ELDU) is very common. ELDU may only be done in consultation with a veterinarian. For more information see Ontario Goat’s “*Extra label drug use in goat production*” factsheet.

Note: You should establish a VCPR relationship and regular herd health visits *before* you have an emergency situation.

Choosing a veterinarian

When choosing a veterinarian for your goats:

- Try to find a veterinarian with interest and experience in goats. If this is not possible, try to find a veterinarian with experience in food animals that is willing to do the required learning to provide good answers to your questions. Ask local producers if they can recommend a

veterinarian to you or contact the *Small Ruminant Veterinarians of Ontario (SRVO)* at www.srvo.ca to find an experienced practitioner near you.

- Before entering into a VCPR ask your veterinarian:
 - Do they make farm visits to your area?
 - How do they provide out of hours service?
 - How is payment handled?
 - If there are multiple veterinarians in a practice, will your animals always be seen by the same veterinarian?
 - How many years of experience do they have working with goats?
- Choose a veterinarian who you can communicate well with and who provides the services that you think you need. You can interview veterinarians until you find the right fit.

Important functions of your veterinarian and a VCPR

Once you have added a veterinarian to your herd management team, you can rely on him or her to perform some or all of the following and tailor the programs to your herd and management system:

- Disease prevention
 - Vaccination programs
 - Parasite control programs
 - Kid management plans
 - Milking routine development and udder health management
 - Disease Screening
 - Biosecurity plans
- Sick animal management
 - Diagnose disease in individuals or groups of animals through visits and physical examinations, postmortems and/or laboratory testing
 - Develop plans to assist in defining common diseases
 - Develop treatment protocols for common diseases, including advice on drug withdrawal times for meat and milk before they are safe for human consumption
 - Monitor treatment records to assess success of prevention and treatment plans
- Reproductive management
 - Assist in determining which goats to breed and when
 - Out of Season breeding plans
 - Buck breeding soundness exams
 - Ultrasound pregnancy diagnosis
 - Dry doe management
- Replacement management
 - Purchasing decisions – health screening, production, quality
 - Culling decisions
- Routine care
 - Euthanasia plans
 - Hoof trimming
 - Disbudding
 - Lameness
 - Nutrition and feeding

Establishing a successful VCPR is an investment in your goat herd and its health and productivity. Each producer and veterinarian can develop the relationship to suit their knowledge, budgets and requirements. Regular visits and follow-up allow veterinarians to gain the most information from your herd and develop the best plan for improving the health and productivity of your goats.

For more information on raising goats refer to:

- [*Best Management Practices for Commercial Goat Production*](#)
- [*Biosecurity Planning Guide for Canadian Goat Producers*](#)
- [*National Farm-level Biosecurity Standard for the Goat Industry*](#)
- [*Canadian Goat On-Farm Food Safety Program*](#)
- [*Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of farm animals-Goats*](#)
- [*Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of farm animals-Transportation*](#)
- [*Facts and Figures about Canadian Goat Farming*](#)

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