

GOATS

Code of practice
for
goats
in
Western Australia

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PREFACE

The **Code of practice for goats in Western Australia** is based on *The Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals-Goats* and has been adapted for use in Western Australia. The original *Model Code* was prepared for the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management (SCARM) and endorsed by the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand (ARMCANZ) for use as a national code. It was prepared in consultation with the relevant industry organizations and state agencies.

This code has been prepared to assist all persons handling or using goats in Western Australia, and reference to this code is made in Regulations provided under Section 25 the Animal Welfare Act 2002 for the purposes of a defence against cruelty. It is not intended to be used for either audit or compliance purposes.

This Western Australian version of the code is supported by the livestock industries and the Department of Agriculture. It is based on current knowledge and technology. It will be reviewed in the future on a needs basis, to take account of advances in the understanding of animal physiology and behaviour, technological changes in animal husbandry and their relationship to the welfare of animals.

For anyone using animals for scientific purposes, as defined in the Animal Welfare Act 2002, this code should be read and used in conjunction with the “scientific use code”.

Further copies of this code are available from the Department of Local Government and Regional Development or from the internet at: <http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au>

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Code is intended as a guide for all people responsible for the welfare and husbandry of goats.

Goats are kept in situations which vary from extensive grazing to close confinement and housing. Whatever the form of husbandry, owners and managers of goats have a responsibility to care for the welfare of the animals under their control.

The basic behavioural, anatomical and physiological needs of goats are considered in this document, irrespective of the method of husbandry practiced.

The importance of competent stockmanship in animal welfare cannot be over-emphasised. The important skill of a competent stockman is the ability to recognise the early signs of distress or disease in goats so that the cause can be identified, and prompt, appropriate, remedial action taken.

The basic requirements for the welfare of goats are:

- Food and water to sustain health and vitality.
- Sufficient space to provide freedom to stand, lie down, stretch, turn around and groom themselves.
- Protection from predation.
- Protection from disease, including disease that can be exacerbated by management.
- Protection from extremes of climate during certain phases of their life.
- Protection from pain, suffering and injury.

2. FOOD

2.1

The food available to goats should meet the requirements of maintenance, growth, pregnancy, lactation and fibre production, and any extra demands such as exercise or cold stress.

2.2

The stocking rates of goats on pure pasture should not exceed the recommended rates for sheep on such pasture.

2.3

If browsing is available, it may be possible to increase the stocking rate. The feed quality of scrub is often very low. Goats are selective feeders and will not thrive or produce on poor quality feed.

2.4

If only browsing is available, its height must be such that it is within reach of younger kids.

2.5

Feral goats require a conditioning period to adjust from browsing scrub under range conditions to grazing pasture under intensive conditions, to allow them to change feeding habits and for their gut flora to change appropriately.

2.6

Goats should be protected as far as possible from foods and materials deleterious to their health. (e.g. many ornamental plants are toxic.)

3. WATER

3.1

Clean, potable water should be readily accessible to goats.

3.2

The amount of water drunk depends upon the dry matter content of feed eaten and surface moisture available from rain or dew, body weight of goats and production level, especially of lactating goats. A goat in full lactation may consume up to 10 litres of water per day; this intake may double if the temperature exceeds 40°C.

3.3

Water quality (salinity, taste, temperature) can adversely affect intake. Goats may adapt to high salt levels (> 5000 mg/L) but generally prefer saline levels less than 2000 mg/L.

4. DROUGHT

4.1

Drought may be defined as a severe rainfall shortage which leads to deficiency in water and/or feed supply for grazing goats. Drought is not the normal seasonal shortage of feed.

4.2

Goats being fed for survival should be examined at feeding times. Less thrifty goats may require segregation for special treatment.

4.3

Where provisions for health and vitality cannot be met, goats should be moved, agisted, sold or slaughtered on site.

4.4

Drought-affected goats which are unable to rise and walk should be destroyed humanely on site.

4.5

Drought-affected goats which go down after limited exercise are NOT fit to travel. They should be fed to improve condition to enable them to travel or, alternatively, be slaughtered humanely on site.

4.6

Drought-affected goats still able to walk but in an emaciated condition, and for which supplementary feed or agistment is not available, should be sent directly to a knackery, rendering works or abattoir, as close as possible to their on-farm location, or slaughtered humanely on site. They should not be consigned to saleyards.

4.7

Drought-affected goats should be protected against exposure to extremes of temperature and weather. Vehicles transporting drought-affected goats should be designed to give adequate cooling in hot weather and protection against cold, wet conditions.

5. PROTECTION FROM CLIMATIC EXTREMES AND PREDATION

5.1

Goats are sensitive to extremes of weather and all reasonable steps should be taken to minimise the effects of climatic extremes and other factors that produce either cold stress or heat stress.

5.2

Goats are vulnerable to cold stress, especially off-shears or when in low body condition, or during continuous rain when in full fleece. They require the provision of effective shelter or good natural shelter.

5.3

Steps should be taken to ensure that, as far as practicable, goats can be attended to promptly in the event of fire, flood, injury or disease.

5.4

Reasonable precautions should be taken to protect goats from predation. The use of electric fencing should be considered.

6. INTENSIVE GOAT SYSTEMS – HOUSING AND ACCOMODATION

6.1

Feedlots and feed pads should provide sufficient space for each goat to be able to stand, turn around, stretch, lie down and move to feed and water.

6.2

The design, location and construction of feedlots and feed pads should take account of topography, climate, age and size of animal, space and feed require-ments, and labour and management skills available.

6.3

Tethered and confined goats should have enough space to be able to lie down, stretch, stand up and to exercise. They should have access to shelter, food and water. Tethering is not recommended unless there is constant supervision of the goats.

6.4

In some States, the provision of shelter for tethered goats is a legal requirement.

6.5

Sheds or arks (mobile sheds) provided for tethered goats should be of sufficient size to allow the animal to stand up, turn around and lie down.

6.6

Goats should not be permanently tethered by lengths less than 4 body lengths, unless selective veterinary therapy under shorter tether is prescribed, or for show, display or approved experimentation purposes.

6.7

Collars, ropes, chains and similar materials used for tethering of goats should be constructed and used so as to avoid injury and pain.

6.8

In the case of housed goats, ventilation, whether mechanical or natural, should assist in the removal of environmental heat, moisture, dust, carbon dioxide and other noxious gases and airborne infectious organisms, and replace these with fresh air. This air should be distributed in a manner appropriate to the location of the stock and the design of the building.

7. GOAT HANDLING FACILITIES

7.1

Sheds, pens, yards, lanes, loading ramps, dips and areas where goats are forced to congregate should be so constructed and maintained and of such a size as to minimise the risk of injury, disease and overcrowding.

7.2

Floors of yards, sheds, pens and loading ramps should have a surface that is not slippery and which facilitates cleaning.

7.3

Uneven or steeply sloping surfaces greatly increase the risk of falling because goats often display defensive reflexes when confronted with such situations and may make sudden erratic movements.

7.4

Goats should spend as little time as management practices allow confined in yards, so as to minimise chances of injury. Handling of goats in small groups, particularly kids and heavily pregnant does, will minimise injury in yards.

7.5

Special facilities should be available to permit adequate restraint of goats which require inspection or treatment because of illness or injury.

7.6

Goats should be caught and restrained with care. Horned goats may be restrained by holding the horn at its base, not at its tip, as this may cause the horn to break.

7.7

Goats should be picked up bodily, not by their horns or hair.

8. MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

8.1 General

8.1.1 Practices that cause pain should not be carried out on goats if painless and practical methods of husbandry can be adopted to achieve the same result.

8.1.2 Any injury, illness or distress observed should be promptly treated.

8.1.3 Management procedures carried out on goats should be competently performed.

8.1.4 Restraint used on goats should be the minimum necessary to perform procedures efficiently.

8.1.5 Hygienic precautions should be undertaken for all operations.

8.1.6 Pregnant does are susceptible to stress-induced abortion. Animal husbandry practices should induce minimal stress, whether from extreme climatic conditions, mustering, handling, prolonged transportation or nutritional factors.

8.2 Supervision

8.2.1 Frequency and level of inspection should be related to the likelihood of welfare problems of goats.

8.2.2 Goats kept under intensive management should be inspected, fed and watered daily.

8.2.3 Goats grazing under more extensive conditions require variable supervision, according to density of stocking, availability of suitable feed, reliability of water supply, age and pregnancy status.

8.2.4 Agreements relating to leased land and agistment should specify who has the responsibility of supervising stock.

8.3 Castration

8.3.1 Castration should be carried out on kids as early as management practices allow, preferably before 2 months of age.

8.3.2 Surgical castration without the use of anaesthesia should be confined to bucks under two months of age.

8.4 Disbudding, Dehorning and Horn Trimming

8.4.1 Disbudding of kids should be by heat cautery only. The entire horn bud must be removed and the operation must be performed as soon as the bud can be located. Regrowth of horn occurs very readily, so kids should be checked two to three weeks after disbudding.

8.4.2 Disbudding by means of chemicals is not recommended.

8.4.3 Dehorning (as distinct from disbudding) should only be performed under general anaesthesia or narcosis.

8.4.4 Dehorning should only be performed by an experienced operator or by, or under the supervision of, a veterinary surgeon.

8.4.5 Horn trimming or the removal of sharp horn points is recommended to minimise injury to other goats. It should be performed so as to avoid bleeding and ensure that no sharp horn projections remain after the procedure.

8.5 Milking Practices - Dairy Goats

8.5.1 Lactating dairy goats in full lactation should not be left for more than 24 hours without relief by milking.

8.5.2 Careful management of the milking operation and proper milking machine function directly influence longevity of lactation, total production and prevalence of mastitis in dairy goats. Milking machines should be checked and, if necessary, adjusted by a competent technician at least annually.

8.6 Shearing

8.6.1 It is normal practice to shear fibre goats at least once each year. The procedure should be performed by a competent operator and care should be taken to prevent injuries.

8.6.2 Shearing stress should be kept to a minimum by avoiding undue yarding and travelling procedures, avoiding exposure to adverse weather and by providing access to feed and water if animals are confined for more than 24 hours.

8.6.3 It is desirable that goats are provided with access to effective shelter or good natural cover after shearing. The critical period is the first six weeks post-shearing, depending on body condition and seasonal weather conditions.

8.7 Health

8.7.1 Appropriate preventive treatment should be administered to goats for diseases that are common in a district or are occurring in a goat herd.

8.7.2 Suitable methods of administration of vaccines and medication should be employed.

8.7.3 Parenteral medicines, such as vaccines and other injectables, internal medication, such as vaccines and drenches, and external medication, such as dips and pour-on formulations, should be given in strict accordance with the manufacturers' instructions. Any medication which does not bear specific instructions for treatment of goats should only be used on veterinary advice.

8.7.4 Sick, injured or diseased goats should be given prompt and appropriate treatment or be slaughtered. Separation of such goats from non-affected goats is recommended until the condition resolves. When emergency slaughter is necessary, it should be performed on the farm in an humane manner.

8.7.5 Difficult kiddings should be diagnosed promptly and does assisted only by a skilled and competent operator or by, or under the supervision of, a registered veterinary surgeon.

8.7.6 When does are producing more milk than is required by their kids, they should be hand-milked to relieve udder pressure.

8.7.7 Hoof trimming should be performed if necessary to remove over-growth of horn.

8. IDENTIFICATION

8.1

Ear tagging, ear marking, ear notching and ear tattooing are the preferred methods of identifying goats.

8.2

Branding by any means should not be performed.

9. MUSTERING, DRIVING, YARDING AND DRAFTING

9.1

Goats should not be driven to the point of collapse.

9.2

The use of goading devices and dogs for the handling and moving of goats should be limited to the minimum necessary to complete the procedures.

10. HUMANE DESTRUCTION OF GOATS

10.1

Goats should be humanely destroyed using the behind-the-horns method. The captive-bolt pistol or firearm should be directed to the skull behind the horns in the line with the animals mouth (See Figure 1).

10.2

Kids may also be shot from the front, as for cattle, directing the shot at a point of intersection of lines taken from the base of each ear to the opposite eye (See Figure 2). This method is not suitable in mature goats as the brain is located well back in the skull compared with other livestock.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

10.3

Destruction by severance of the throat and spinal cord is satisfactory if performed by an experienced operator, but should only be performed if a captive bolt pistol or firearm is not available.