This weekend my family and I found ourselves spending the day bedding the barns and trying to get the goats dry areas to lay down. Winter came in with a lot of rain and a little snow for us this year and keeping goats dry has been a bit of an art form at times. As I write this article, it is raining again and the pastures and lots are holding water in many places. As I reflect on our efforts, I am reminded of the value of a dry bed. Goats can be tough and handle the elements well, however there is a tremendous value in providing a clean, warm, and dry location to lay down. A dry bedded area can provide financial savings for every producer and can come in many forms including reduced feed bills, lower veterinary costs, and improved overall productivity.

**Reduced Feed Bills:** It takes more energy to fight the elements. Because of this, goats will need to eat more to meet their daily needs. If goats are left in mud or wet bedding, they will use even more energy per day to maintain themselves. Goats eat approximately 3-4% of their body weight in dry matter per day. When the cold weather hits, goats will often need more supplementation per head per day in the form of a grain supplement. If they are left in wet conditions or lack a place to get out of the elements, they will require even more supplementation to maintain the same level of performance. The dollars saved on reduced bedding will be spent and more on supplements as a result.

**Lower Veterinary Costs:**  Stress created by wet bedding can be very hard on goats. When moisture builds up in the bedding, ammonia levels follow and bacteria levels rise. Ammonia is a major concern for respiratory disease. The ammonia levels are always strongest closest to the ground, and irritate a goat’s airways. This irritation increases the risks of respiratory disease in young stock in particular. Once respiratory disease is established it can be difficult to correct if ammonia levels are not first corrected in bedding. When evaluating the cleanliness of a bedded area it is advisable to get down to a goat’s level where the ammonia levels will be stronger. If it irritates your lungs when you breathe at that level, it will irritate a goat’s lungs too. Additionally, wet bedding is a great growth medium for bacteria. These bacteria levels create additional risks such as mastitis, umbilical infections, sheath infections, and staph infections. Treatments for such diseases can cost hundreds of dollars yet provide no guarantees that udders will not be ruined, bucks will not be sterile, or that kids will not die. Knowing this, investing in a good bedded area can be a great way to reduce the vet bills at the end of the year.

**Improved Overall Productivity:** Productivity is tied to many things. As producers we often focus on the obvious factors such as genetics, nutrition, and hardiness, however more focus should be placed on stress. Every time we handle goats, or the weather changes, goats will have an increase in stress. When we do not provide a dry location or proper shelter, stress levels increase dramatically. These increases in stress can affect the overall health, growth rate, milk production, and even the fertility of any particular goat. It is important to note the value of a pregnancy, a live birth, or fertile stock as these are some of the risks when considering limited bedding or shelter. A good dry location can diminish the stress levels of stock and as a result overall productivity can increase.

It is important to consider all factors when managing livestock. As we invest time and effort into the big items such as selecting genetics and general feeding practices it is also important to remember the little things such as proper bedding. While clean bedding cannot eliminate all of the risks for disease or performance issues, it is a good place to start. Take time to invest in proper bedding today.