**WEANING STRATEGIES MAY BE THE KEY TO REDUCING THE RISKS OF MASTITIS**

Mastitis is a dirty word. It can quickly cut a doe’s productive life short and rob a producer of the best performance in the kids born. Thankfully it is almost entirely avoidable. We can greatly reduce the risks during the weaning process in particular if we take the time to implement the proper weaning strategies. Health concerns during the weaning process is nothing new. However, the focus is often on the kids’ health risks and less on the does. With that in mind, there are a few simple strategies each producer should implement.

Start the weaning process prior to actually weaning: Udder engorgement following weaning is a high-risk period for mastitis. In our herd we take away the grain supplementation from the does seven days prior to weaning the kids. By doing so, we can reduce the amount of milk a doe naturally produces a day. This also encourages kids to eat more grain in the creep feeder. This reduction in milk can both reduce the dependence of the kids on the doe and reduce the risks of udder engorgement following weaning. It is a simple low stress strategy with a tremendous rate of return in both the kids and does.

Fenceline Weaning and Cleanliness: When discussing mastitis, cleanliness is ground zero. While this is not the solitary cause, it is in fact the most common introduction. It is imperative to monitor areas does and kids congregate as groups. Weaning stress can cause a great deal of fear and risks to both does and kids alike. Does will often congregate along fencelines closest to where the cries of their weaned kids originate. This creates a tremendous risk for does as they stand and lay in the small area in which they urinate and deficate while crying for their kids. It can lead to difficulty keeping udders clean and become a breeding ground for bacteria. With the introduction of fenceline weaning in combination with starting the weaning process prior to actually weaning, these concerns can be nearly eliminated. In order to fenceline wean a group of kids, does must be moved to a pen sharing a fenceline with the kid pen for the first few days following weaning. Doing this will greatly reduce the stress on the kids by allowing them to see their mothers and the stress on the mothers because the kids will cry less. When the kids cry less, does will spend less time congregating at the fences standing in their own filth. After a few days the kids will grow accustomed to the new grain and forage only diet and does can safely be moved without creating a high stress environment for either does or kids.

Focusing our efforts on reducing health risks of any kind is a worthy effort. While it is impossible to guarantee a clean pen or pasture 100% of the time, or that udders will never get engorged, any effort invested to do so can greatly reduce the risks of mastitis. As we prepare for another kidding season, implementing new strategies may be the key to successful breeding seasons.