

ANIMAL HEALTH

STUBBORN AS AN OLD GOAT



Opinion



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Mary-Anne is a volunteer on assignment with Animals Fiji as part of the Australian Volunteers Program, an Australian Government Initiative.

Fiji has about 250,000 goats, and 190,000 tonnes of local goat meat is produced annually. Goat meat is a staple in Fiji diets. However, Fiji still imports \$1 million of goat meat every year. There is also a strong demand for goat milk, particularly near larger towns and cities.

Goats offer opportunities for young and low-income farmers. Due to their size and temperament, these animals are easily handled, require relatively low investment, and, due to their birth rate and fast maturation, can quickly produce an income. Goats can provide a small but significant amount of animal protein through milk and meat to the farmer and their family.

WHAT DO GOATS EAT?

An advantage of goats over other livestock is that they are browsers. They eat leaves, twigs, vines, and shrubs, so they are excellent for cleaning up even very steep, overgrown areas. Their usefulness in cleanup reduces the need for manual labour or machinery in an area where you might be considering planting a crop.

In addition to the nutrition goats get from quality pasture, they can be fed hay, grains and other crop byproducts. For optimum growth,



Male tethered goat (Buck).

goats should have a balanced mineral supplement designed specifically for goats. This usually includes minerals like selenium, copper, and zinc.

Water

All animals need a regular water supply, so be sure your goat has access to a clean, cool water supply in the form of a water trough that is easily accessible and in the shade. If the female goats do not have enough water, they will eat less and milk production will decrease.

How do you manage your goat herd

Goat management in Fiji is primarily via tethering or extensive systems.

■ Tethering:

In this method, goats are tethered during the day and kept in secure pens or sheds at night. The goat is tied to a peg, tree, or some solid object and can be moved often to have fresh grazing areas. Farmers need to be careful that the goats don't get entangled and harm themselves. They also need shade and water, and the area should be free from predators such as stray dogs.

■ Extensive:

In this situation, animals graze large areas of land unsuitable for agriculture. Goats are allowed to graze during the day and locked up at night.

Grazing goats in long grass helps to reduce infection rates, as the nematode eggs are concentrated low in plants and on the soil surface. However, goats like to feed on the tips of grasses. Moving animals to a new grazing area every week or two allows time for the nematode eggs to die and reduces the chance of re-infection.

■ COCCIDIOSIS

Coccidiosis is caused by protozoa, which are single-celled microscopic organisms. The organisms grow and multiply in the walls of the gut of the goat, destroying the gut cells. Goats

KEEPING YOUR GOAT SAFE

Goats, particularly females and kids, are vulnerable to dog attacks. Particularly at night, it is vital to, keep goats in a fenced / housed area for their safety. Goats require specific fencing as they can be destructive and are highly experienced "escape artists." Fences should be 1.5 – 2m high.

The wire mesh and gaps should be less than 10cm x 10cm to avoid trapping heads and horns. Ideally, goats should be housed in a raised shed safely out of reach by stray dogs.

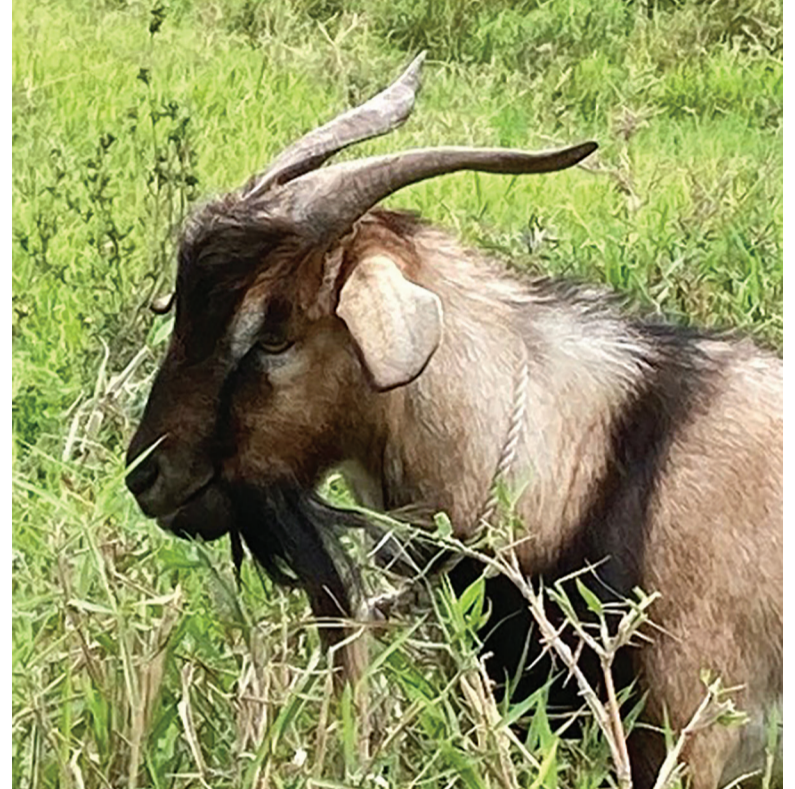
Breeding goats

Farm goats reach sexual maturity at about 4-8 months, but it is best to wait until they are 8-10 months old before breeding. A doe becomes fertile every 18-21 days and this lasts 1-3 days which is the best time for them to become pregnant.

Pregnancy in goats lasts about 150 days. During this time, the doe needs extra care and feed.

Most female goats give birth without any problems, but be careful to monitor them and be ready to call a vet if they appear to be experiencing difficulty. A normal labour is about 12-14 hours.

Once the kids are born, ensure they are breathing and suckling. They should start suckling within an hour of birth. The kids need colostrum, the doe's first milk, within



Tethered goat.

the first few hours of being born as it provides essential antibodies to protect the kid from disease.

Within a week, kids will start eating solid food, but they should continue to nurse or be bottle-fed until they're at least 8-10 weeks old.

Kids should be dewormed according to your vet's recommendations for optimum health and growth.

HOW MANY KIDS CAN A DOE FEED?

Goats have only two teats and need to stand while feeding, so only two kids can feed at once. Having more than two kids means standing for a long time, and the two strongest kids may exclude any weaker kids, causing them to become malnourished.

Bottle feeding is not ideal, but it is the best option if a doe has more than two kids, a kid is born too small or weak to nurse, or a doe rejects a kid. Colostrum can be taken from the mother or another doe, and the kid can be bottle-fed if the kid is too weak or the mother cannot supply it.

At two weeks, if the kid is growing significantly slower than its siblings, it needs to be separated from the mother and the kid introduced to bottle feeding. This often requires effort over many days.

In summary

Regularly observe your goats for

changes in behaviour, growth rate, appetite, walking difficulties, and physical appearance.

These could be early signs of illness.

If anything irregular is seen, potential health issues can be corrected early, especially if an important breeding buck or doe is involved. A vet can provide help before it gets worse.

Overall, goat farming offers opportunities for farmers in Fiji, providing income and sustainable agricultural practices. Managing diseases, proper nutrition, and ensuring safety are critical aspects of successful goat farming.

must read

ANIMALS FIJI

As a non-profit charity, Animals Fiji depends on donations to continue in its work to support animals across Fiji.

To find out more about Animals Fiji's services and how you can help, please contact their Savusavu Clinic at (+679) 998 6253 or Nadi Clinic at (+679) 993 6647 or visit their website at www.animalsfiji.org.
>ANIMALS FIJI

DISEASE AND ILLNESS

Goats are very susceptible to stomach issues so being aware of these and other conditions is very important in managing your goats.

■ GASTROINTESTINAL NEMATODES

are small internal parasites. Current control methods require expensive medicine and, if done incorrectly, can lead to developing resistance to the medicine. The available medicines kill the nematode but do not kill any eggs excreted in the animal droppings so that eggs can be ingested by animals grazing in the same area.

naturally have these organisms and excrete the eggs in their faeces. If the animal is stressed, it makes the goat more susceptible. It causes diarrhoea, which rapidly increases the eggs in the environment where the herd can ingest them.

OTHER ISSUES INCLUDE:

■ ORF

Orf is a virus infection in goats, commonly called sore mouth or scabby mouth. Animals infected with Orf virus typically develop scabby sores (lesions) around their lips, muzzle, and in their

mouth.

The virus is highly contagious to both other goats and humans. You need to immediately seek veterinary professional assistance if you suspect orf in your goats.

■ LAMENESS AND ROT FOOT

In some years, there is a high incidence of foot rot and foot abscess, which cause severe lameness. The lameness restricts animal grazing, reducing their weight gain, and it can also affect

mating and kid survival.

Signs include limping and reduced feeding.

To prevent the problem, avoid grazing animals in low-lying, muddy areas and trim or shave the hooves two or three times a year.

The time between trimming hooves depends on how much natural wear occurs.

If an animal is severely affected, a vet should be consulted on cleaning and the use of chemicals to control the bacterial and fungal infection.