

Revision to Alert from JTC

Following a recent alert from the Judges Training Committee that is causing much speculation and concern, the President of NPGA and the Chair of the HER committee have asked me to look into the origin of the scare, the scope and severity of the problem, and future corrective actions.

The Chair of the JTC has identified that the disease being referred to was Johne's, which is not a new disease in goats (as well as cattle, sheep, llamas, and alpacas) and is therefore not a new communicable disease that requires emergency action. It is caused by a bacterium that infects primarily young animals but generally does not show symptoms until the animals are older than 18 months. Adult goats with advanced disease lose weight and body condition rapidly and shed the bacteria in feces, which can then provide a route of infection. Bacterial shedding is elevated in infected does immediately after kidding, so this exposure to young kids can be a primary route of infection. Adult goats are less susceptible to infection. Infected pygmy goats shed less bacteria than cattle and other goat breeds, so the general risk of transmission is lower. A University expert in Johne's has given the opinion that the handling by judges at a goat show is extremely unlikely to cause transmission of this disease, unlike some other established communicable diseases. Accordingly, the notification on judge checks has changed to allow for teat, udder, and testicle checks, but not bite checks until further information can be gathered.

Johne's is still a serious disease that should be avoided and eliminated from pygmy goat herds. Testing herds and definitively identifying infected individual animals (or confirming their absence) is complicated by the biology of the disease and requires multiple testing by more than one type of test. The details of testing strategies and interpretations are beyond the scope of this communication but will be the subject of a more detailed article in the near future. A number of ranches are currently evaluating multiple tests and testing centers to support claims of Johne's-free and/or to identify and isolate any infected animals. The data from this testing initiative should help to identify the best testing strategies for pygmy goat owners to use in the future.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or information that may be helpful with this investigation and research about Johne's.

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