

## Animal Welfare: Codes of recommendations for the welfare of livestock - Goats



The Code of recommendations for the welfare of goats, which is made under Section 3 (1) of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 and approved by Parliament, is intended to encourage all those responsible for looking after these animals to adopt the highest standards of husbandry. It takes account of five basic animal needs: freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition; appropriate comfort and shelter; the prevention, or rapid diagnosis and treatment of, injury, disease or infestation; freedom from fear; and freedom to display most normal patterns of behaviour.

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## **Preface**

The Code is backed up by the law of the land. To cause unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress to any farm animal is an offence under The Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 - the breach of a Code provision, whilst not an offence in itself, can nevertheless be used in evidence as tending to establish the guilt of anyone accused of causing suffering under the Act (Section 3(4)).

Without good stockmanship, animal welfare can never be adequately protected. The Code is designed to help stockmen particularly the young and inexperienced to reach the required standard.

**The Code came into operation on 1 September 1989.**

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## **Code of recommendation for the welfare of goats**

For the purposes of this Code the word 'goat' refers to all caprine stock, and an animal under which six months is considered to be a kid.

### **Introduction**

1. Goats in Great Britain cover a variety of breed types each with its own unique characteristics. The recommendations in this Code are appropriate to goats under various husbandry systems, and their application will help to ensure that the welfare of the stock is safeguarded.
2. The goat has a natural tendency to browse and range for its food and these factors should be taken into account in deciding on a suitable environment. Many breeds of goat require more protection from inclement weather than cattle or sheep and, whatever husbandry system is adopted, some form of shelter should be provided.
3. Goats, being gregarious animals, prefer to live in social groups and appear to enjoy human contact. If kept singly, they require more frequent contact with, and supervision by, the stockman. They should always be treated as individuals, even when kept in large herds.

When forming new groups, care should be taken to avoid fighting and stress if adult animals are mixed (see [paragraph 30](#)). Goats prefer to be led but can be driven if care is taken.

4. The number and type of goats kept and the stocking rate should depend on the suitability of the environment and the skills of the stockman.

5. Although very large herds can be managed successfully, in general the larger the size of the unit the greater the degree of skill and conscientiousness needed to safeguard welfare. The size of a unit should not be increased nor should a large unit be set up unless it is reasonably certain that the stockman in charge will be able to safeguard the welfare of the individual animal.

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## Health

6. The stockman should know the normal behaviour of goats and recognise the signs which indicate good health. These include good appetite, alertness, good coat condition, absence of lameness, firm round droppings (similar to those of a sheep or rabbit) and no visible wounds, abscesses or injuries. Purchased stock should be healthy and free from infectious disease.

7. Goats should be inspected regularly, particularly for foot condition (see [paragraph 50](#)) and parasitic infections of the skin (e.g. lice and mange), to which they are susceptible.

8. The health of the goat should be safeguarded by the appropriate use of preventive measures such as parasitic control and vaccination programmes based on veterinary advice (see [paragraph 14](#)).

9. When goats are ill they soon lose the will to live. The stockman should identify the cause of the goat's deterioration, should separate injured or ailing goats and take immediate remedial action. Prompt veterinary advice should be obtained if the goat appears to be seriously ill or in pain, the cause of the deterioration is not clear or if the stockman's action is not effective.

10. If a goat has to be destroyed on the farm, this must be done humanely, and, where possible, by a person who is experienced in both the technique and the equipment used for slaughtering goats.

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## Feed and water

11. Goats should receive daily a balanced diet which is adequate to maintain full health and vigour. They should have access to sufficient fresh, clean, water at all times. If this is impossible for any reason, such water should be provided at least twice daily. Goats prefer water which is not excessively cold.

12. Feed should be palatable and should be placed in suitable racks or containers. Stale and fouled food should be removed.

13. Goats need a comparatively large quantity of bulky feed. They have a preference for coarse forages and tree branches. Suitable foods for housed goats include pea and bean haulm, clover, lucerne and meadow hay and silage(s) and coarse, flaky or pelleted concentrated food. Care should be taken not to over-feed certain foods, for example concentrates, as this can lead to such problems as bloat, acidosis, laminitis and obesity.

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## Grazing

14. Grazing should include a variety of plants to ensure an adequate intake of roughage and minerals. If grazing is poor, supplementary feeding may be required. Goats should be moved at appropriate intervals to clean pastures to control parasite infestation and this should be combined with a regular parasite control programme (see [paragraph 8](#)).

15. Being browsing animals, goats should be denied access to poisonous shrubs, trees and plants within grazing areas. Well-known examples that are poisonous are rhododendron, yew, laurel and bracken but there are many others and expert advice should be sought where necessary.

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## Fencing

16. Goats have a tendency to jump and clamber. Fencing should be strong enough and of sufficient height (at least 1.2m) to prevent them from escaping. It should be designed, constructed and maintained so as to avoid the risk of injury.

17. Electric fences should be so designed, installed and maintained that contact with them does not cause more than momentary discomfort to the goat. Electric mesh type fences are not suitable for horned goats and young kids.

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## **Tethering**

18. Outdoor tethering, if carried out, requires a high degree of supervision with inspections at frequent intervals. Tethered goats are particularly vulnerable to worrying by dogs and teasing by children. Goats should not be tethered where there are obstacles and a risk of the chain becoming entangled. Tethers should be designed and maintained so as not to cause distress or injury to the goats. Collars should be light but substantial and attached to a strong chain not less than 3 metres in length with at least two swivels. Particular care should be taken to provide food, water and shelter.

19. Kids should never be tethered.

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## **Housing, buildings and equipment**

20. Advice on welfare aspects should be sought when constructing and modifying buildings. The lying area should be covered, dry and well-lit with sufficient ventilation which does not cause draughts at animal level. Goats are very inquisitive and all gate / door fastenings should be goat-proof.

21. Fittings and internal surfaces of all buildings and equipment to which goats have access should not have sharp edges or projections. Fittings should be so arranged as to avoid injury.

22. Surfaces should not be treated with paints or wood preservatives which may cause illness or death. There is a risk of lead poisoning from old paint work especially when second hand materials are used.

23. Hay racks and nets should be properly positioned and designed to avoid the risk of injury, in particular to the eyes of all types of goats. Hay nets should not be used for young kids and horned goats as there is the danger of them becoming entangled.

24. When goats are fed in groups, there should be sufficient trough space or feeding points to avoid undue competition for food.

25. Water bowls and troughs should be constructed and sited so as to avoid fouling and to minimise the risk of water freezing in cold weather. They should be kept thoroughly clean and be checked at least once daily, and more frequently in extreme weather conditions, to ensure that they are in working order.

26. Floors should be designed, constructed and maintained so as to avoid discomfort, distress or injury to the goats. Solid floors should be well drained. Sufficient clean dry bedding incorporating straw or other suitable material should be provided to ensure comfort and reduce the risk of injury to the udder.

27. If housed, male goats should be within sight and sound of goats or other animals and in strongly constructed buildings which allow sufficient room for exercise.

28. Housed goats should have access to a yard or pasture.

29. The space allowance when penned should be calculated in relation to the age, size and class of stock. This and the size of the group should be based on appropriate advice. Horned and polled goats should not be put in the same pen unless reared together.

30. The introduction of a new goat or goats to an existing group can result in bullying. This may be alleviated by increasing the space allowance or by penning the new animal adjacent to the existing group for a short period.

31. All electrical installations at mains voltage should be inaccessible to goats, well insulated, safeguarded from rodents and, properly earthed.

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### **Mechanical services and equipment**

32. All equipment and services, including drinkers, milking machines, ventilating fans, heating and lighting units, fire extinguishers and alarm systems, should be kept clean, inspected regularly and kept in good working order. Alternative ways of milking and maintaining a satisfactory environment should be available in case of failure.

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### **Pregnancy and kidding**

33. Heavily pregnant females should be handled with care to avoid distress and injury which may result in premature kidding.

34. Pregnant and nursing females should receive sufficient food to maintain the health and bodily condition of the goat and ensure the development of healthy kids. This is particularly important during the last 6 weeks of pregnancy. Water should always be available.

35. Stockmen should pay particular attention to cleanliness and hygiene. Every effort should be made to prevent the build up and spread of infection by ensuring that kidding pens are provided with adequate clean bedding and are regularly cleansed and disinfected. A kidding pen within sight and sound of other goats is desirable. Any dead kids should be removed without delay.

36. Stockmen should be sufficiently familiar with problems arising at kidding to know when to summon help. Veterinary advice should be sought when the need arises.

37. It is vital that every newly-born kid receives colostrum from its dam or from another source as soon as possible and in any case within 6 hours of birth. Adequate supplies of colostrum should be stored for emergencies but pooled colostrum, for example, from other premises, may constitute a disease risk.

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### **Artificial rearing**

38. Artificial rearing can give rise to problems and, to be successful, requires close attention to detail and high standards of supervision and stockmanship. Particular attention should be paid to cleanliness and hygiene.

39. Young kids should always have access to milk substitutes or be fed at least 2 or 3 times each day. Milk from other dams could constitute a disease risk. Fresh fibrous food should be available from 1 to 2 weeks of age.

40. Some form of safe supplementary heating, particularly in the early days of life, may be necessary.

41. A dry bedded lying area and adequate ventilation should be provided at all times.

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### **Disposal of unwanted kids**

42. Unwanted kids should be treated as humanely as those being kept for rearing and, if they are to be killed, arrangements should be made for this to be done as humanely as possible (see [paragraph 10](#)).

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## Milking

43. The stockman should be aware of the specific problems of a lactating goat and the ways in which these problems can be avoided or alleviated. Veterinary advice should be sought where necessary.

44. Special attentions should be paid to milking techniques so that injury to teats can be avoided. Good milking practices should include careful handling, an examination of foremilk and the avoidance of excessive stripping.

45. Before and after milking, hygiene measures should be adopted to reduce the spread of disease. Failure to attend to hygiene and to the efficient functioning of milking machines can lead to mastitis and damage to teats.

46. Goats can milk through to 24 months but this should be supported by adequate nutrition (see [paragraph 11](#)).

47. Lactating goats should be milked daily or sufficiently often according to yield.

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## Milking Parlours and Equipment

48. Pens, ramps, milking parlours and milking equipment should be properly designed, constructed and maintained to prevent injury and distress.

49. It is essential to ensure that milking machines are functioning correctly by proper maintenance and adjustment of vacuum levels, pulsation rates and ratios, taking account of manufacturers' recommendations.

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## Foot care

50. Close attention should be given to the condition of the feet and, where necessary, regular foot trimming should be carried out. Goats should be kept in accommodation which is dry underfoot.



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### **Disbudding and dehorning**

51. These operations must be carried out by a veterinary surgeon. If disbudding is to be carried out, this should be done at the earliest possible age; 2 -3 days is ideal but not later than 10 days. Dehorning an adult goat is a stressful procedure and should be avoided.

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### **Castration**

52. Castration, if necessary, must be carried out by a trained operator in strict accordance with the law.

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### **Shearing and combing (Fibre production)**

53. When shearing, care should be taken not to nick or cut the skin. Where a wound does occur, immediate treatment should be given.

54. The goat is particularly susceptible to changes in temperature. Unless housed, goats should only be shorn in suitable weather conditions. Combing is preferable to shearing in adverse weather conditions.

55. Protection by housing or by the use of a coat should be provided if inclement weather occurs after shearing.

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### **Fire and other emergency precautions**

56. Stockmen should make advance plans for dealing with emergencies such as fire, flood or disruption of supplies, and should ensure that all staff are familiar with the appropriate emergency action. At least one responsible member of staff should always be available to take the necessary action.

57. Fire precautions should be a major priority for the good stockman. The provisions of Section 1.3 of British Standard BS5502 should therefore be followed. Expert advice on all fire

precautions is obtainable from fire prevention officers of local fire brigades and from the Fire Prevention Association.

58. In the design of new buildings or alteration of existing ones there should be provision for livestock to be released and evacuated quickly in case of emergency. Materials used in construction should have sufficient fire resistance. Adequate doors and other escape routes should be provided to enable emergency procedures to be followed in the event of a fire.

59. All electrical, gas and oil services should be planned and fitted so that if there is overheating, or flame is generated, the risk of flame spreading to equipment, bedding or the fabric of the building is minimal. It is advisable to site power supply controls outside buildings. Consideration should be given to installing fire alarm systems which can be heard and acted upon at any time of the day or night.

60. In case a 999 call has to be made, notices should be prominently displayed in all livestock buildings stating where the nearest telephone is located. Each telephone should have fixed by it a notice giving instructions for the Fire Brigade on how to reach the buildings where the goats are housed.

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## References

(1) Training courses which follow Code recommendations are arranged for stockmen by the Agricultural Training Board, Agricultural Colleges and local educational authorities. Proficiency testing in relevant subjects is carried out in England and Wales by the National Proficiency Tests Council, and in Scotland by the Scottish Association of Young Farmers' Clubs.

(2) Any installation or extension involving mains electricity should comply with the Regulations for the Electrical Equipment of Buildings issued by the Institute of Electrical Engineers.

(3) The Welfare of Livestock (Intensive Units) Regulations 1978 (SI 1978 No 1800) requires stock-keepers of intensive units to inspect their livestock and the equipment upon which such stock depend at least once daily.

(4) Under the Protection of Animals Acts 1911 to 1988 (in Scotland, the Protection of Animals (Scotland) Act 1912 to 1988), it is an offence to castrate a goat, which has reached the age of 2 months without the use of an anaesthetic. Furthermore the use of a rubber ring or other

device to restrict the flow of blood to the scrotum is only permitted without an anaesthetic if the device is applied during the first week of life. Under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, as amended, only a veterinary surgeon or veterinary practitioner may castrate a goat after it has reached the age of 2 months, or dehorn or disbud a goat, except the trimming of the insensitive tip of an ingrowing horn which, if left untreated, could cause pain or distress.