

Identifying the Barren Doe

by

Dr. Fred C. Homeyer

I have been fortunate over the years to have very few barren does but they do occur in every herd from time to time. Being able to identify the barren doe and remove her from the herd becomes important to the success of a breeding operation.

Does that mature and look like a buck or have what the South Africans call a “butchy” appearance usually have too much testosterone and not enough estrogen. These does typically have very thick bodies and usually have short necks and lack a refined feminine appearance. As they grow up that are easy to identify in the herd.

Of course if you are paying attention to the production data and physical appearance of your does you will notice those does that are never getting pregnant or never bagging up (developing a swollen udder just prior to kidding). These does are obviously barren does.

A doe may not be barren due to having the butch look and lack feminine hormones but rather they may have a low grade reproductive infection as evidenced by discolored rear ends. The doe might have cystic ovaries which can be cured in most instances (consult your vet about this - he may want to use a drug commonly used in race horses for cystic ovaries). Cystic ovaries can sometimes be seen using a sonogram machine.

There are several things that can cause a doe not to breed or to give birth. Some does have spontaneous abortions before kidding. Having your vet do a blood test on the doe to check for such diseases as Q fever or leptosprosis might be helpful in identifying the reason for the problem in the doe. Some does will simply absorb a fetus for no apparent reason. Again a blood test may identify the problem.

I have known of instances where the doe would not breed because the cervix was blocked by such things as a bone from a mummified fetus. This is rare but can happen. A low grade reproductive infection can sometimes be cured by infusing the vagina with a product such as cephalac prescribed by your vet. This is the same drug used to treat poisoning by anthrax in humans and is a very powerful drug.

From this discussion you see that a barren doe can be caused by a lot of different issues. This is certainly not an inclusive list of problems presented in this article. Barren does cost money to maintain on your farm and should be eliminated from the herd after you have determined that they cannot breed. For does with reproductive infections or cystic ovaries I would see if medical therapy from your vet could cure the doe especially if she is valuable to you.