



Historical health aspects of (Dutch) dairy goat farming

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Since the early nineteenth hundreds goat farming became rather unpopular in the Netherlands and the number of goats decreased from 203.000 to approximately only 13.000 in 1970. In the seventies and eighties goats were mainly kept for hobby and only a very low number of small holders were producing goat milk products for the local market. The introduction of the quota system for dairy cattle in the Netherlands in 1984 was a game changer and marked the start of professional production of goat milk and goat cheese. Due to this quotation dairy farmers with a surplus of available labour on farm were not able to grow their dairy cattle enterprise anymore and went looking for alternatives for themselves and their successors. Even pig farmers looking for alternatives and civilians with no farming history took this opportunity to start with milking goats in a new sector with less regulations than the traditional sectors (dairy cows, swine or poultry) all due to quotation. However at that time the number of goats available in the Netherlands was not big enough to start up new goat farms with a reasonable economic sustainable size. Therefore these new goat farmers started importing young female and male goat kids from other European countries with history of dairy goat farming (mainly France). In many cases the kid goats were purchased at large fattening farms where the surplus of the France goat farming industry was gathered and then scattered to different farms in the Netherlands. After arrival at the new goat farms the main on farm animal health challenges for these pioneers, as the dairy goat farmers in those days can be called, were clostridial diseases, listeriosis, abortion in older animals, and rearing problems in kids, like orf (Ecthyma contagiosum), keratoconjunctivitis, pasteurellosis, coccidiosis, and cryptosporidiosis. This presentation will discuss learnings on how to control these management related diseases.

Other challenge, were (and still are) sectoral diseases bought in by import. Although the original kid goats were preselected as clinically healthy animals they originated from herds with history of diseases such as caseous lymphadenitis (CLA, Cheesy gland), paratuberculosis (Johne's disease) and caprine arthritis and encephalitis (CAE). This presentation will also focus on pitfalls and success factors of eradicating a zoonotic disease like CLA. Enlargement of the mammary lymph nodes and the development of abscesses, which can rupture and contaminate the milk, are characteristics of the disease. The disease characteristics itself as well as the impact of CLA on the public image convinced a cooperative of goat farmers in the south of the Netherlands of the need to eradicate CLA. At that time the goats sector was still in its "early years" and both goat farmers and veterinarians had to learn a lot about goat husbandry as well as disease recognition within the not yet a well-organized dairy goat industry. Despite all these confounding factors a program for eradication of CLA in goats can be successful under the following conditions: - identification and registration of all goats; - implementation of a voluntary program, but with strict rules for all milk producing goat farmers - use of a serological test with a high specificity and sensitivity; - disposal of affected or reacting goats; and - the awareness of participating goat farmers that the eradication program is economically justified on the long term, which is of paramount importance with a zoonotic disease in those days still named "Cheesy gland" while at the same time the goat sector was busy developing the goat cheese market towards the consumer.