

Intact Horns and Fencing

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We prayed all winter for hot sunny weather and we have been rewarded ten fold. My goats are loving it. I am melting and listless. As a result, this article will be lighthearted with a promise of an article in September on the goat's immune system.

I have to admit that I am one of those 'bleeding hearts' when it comes to my animals. I have tried through the years to be 'at one with nature' when it comes to my farm management. I am slow to come to the understanding that Mother Nature might work well in the goat's natural habitat but when you place them in the environs that we create on our farms, they have to adapt to what we have created. Our attempts at confining, sheltering and feeding often go against what our goat's instincts are yearning for. Most of us have had to either use structures or fencing that were already in place. Retrofitting is very difficult. My husband, Larry, and I are at the point where we are really doing some soul searching as to how to recreate our farm to suit our goats. In addition to looking at structures, fencing etc. we are also looking at our herd management or rather our nonherd management for improving our farm.

One of the major problems for us at this juncture is horns and fencing. My 'at one with nature' stance was to leave the horns on as this offers natural protection, great scratching instruments for the goats and 'I just didn't have the heart to hurt those poor defenseless little kids'. In theory and practice, this has actually worked well 90% of the time. But the other 10% percent has resulted in the loss of a few nice goats stuck in the fence. The two goats that died this way had shown suicidal tendencies from an early age. They were often found on the wrong side of the fence. As they grew, they were found multiple times stuck in the fence in different configurations. Even a long stint with a piece of pvc pipe duct taped on didn't change their minds. Most of our goats won't try that hard to shove their heads and horns through a too small hole. But, you all know, 'there is one in every crowd'. As a result, our disbudding iron will be hot and ready when the next crop of kids arrives. Any goats who are found caught in the fence more than once will be off to visit Larry Jackson's farm. Our herd will gradually become hornless.

Some people say that goats are stupid animals. I have a few that might fit this description but for the most part goats are pretty smart given the obstacle course that some of us not so bright humans create for them. Disbudding, early neutering, clean water, airy shelters that are kept clean and stout fencing to prevent wandering are key points to our being good and humane herdmasters.