

Wednesday, November 16, 2011

COPD in Sheep

While sheep have been used as a model for asthma and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) in humans there is very little written about the condition in sheep itself except for anecdotal evidence that sheep grazing on kelp on the Scottish Islands are less susceptible to respiratory coughing etc. Something to do with the iodine levels.

We have one lamb (possible two) and one ewe that have what I am starting to believe is COPD. When they are housed inside, especially if the ammonia levels increase or dust levels are higher than desirable, they have upper respiratory tract congestion, coarse breathing and coughing. These conditions do not really respond to antibiotic treatment but respond better to improvements in air quality.

I know that the one lamb had a very difficult time during birth, was a backwards presentation and had problems for the first few days. I am guessing that the lamb may have aspirated some fluid during birth and have some lung damage. I think that has left this animal more vulnerable to air quality issues. He spent the majority of the summer housed outside with access to airy shelters. His breathing difficulty only arrived once he was brought back into the barn.

This morning the lamb's breathing was very rough. I treated him with a wind aid treatment with potassium iodide, eucalyptus oil and peppermint oil. I then put down a heavy layer of fresh bedding. Within minutes his breathing was back to normal. He will be moved into a clean stall with better ventilation.

A second lamb that has mild respiratory problems also underwent a difficult birth.

I have a mature ewe with a similar condition: fine when housed outside but chronic breathing problems that does not respond to antibiotic treatment when housed inside. The condition improves with improved air quality. We bought the ewe as a mature animal so I am not sure if she was the result of a difficult birth but I would not be surprised.

More than even I am convinced that animals are healthier when housed outside. While our barn structure does not allow for huge improvements in air movement (low ceiling bank barn), we are going to do what we can to move more air through the building and minimize the time the animals are inside.

I am also convinced that difficult deliveries, especially backwards presentations predispose the lambs to chronic respiratory vulnerabilities. Unless a lamb is extremely valuable those that underwent a difficult delivery will be slated as market lambs. Ewes that have chronic lambing problems will be culled.

I would love to hear from others that think they may have seen COPD in their sheep.

TTFN,
Laurie