

Treasure Hunting: How to Find a Vet

By Maggie Leman

In many parts of the country a good goat vet is rarer than a hen's tooth, a treasure worth his weight in gold. Finding one can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. They sure don't grow on trees! Okay, I'll stop with the clichés now you get my meaning.

The first place to start hunting a good vet is from the breeder from whom you bought your goats. Then join your regional Pygmy Goat Club and ask the members which vets they recommend. Try looking in the phone book for a large animal vet, especially one that treats small ruminants. Check with the nearby Veterinary College to see what services they offer to goat keepers. Call the county agricultural extension agent. And finally there are 2 good lists on the Internet:

Cybergoats has a list of vets at http://www.cybergoat.com/goat_vet.htm

American Association of Small Ruminant Practitioners has a page you can search at <http://www.aasrp.org/Practitioners/>

The time to find a good vet is BEFORE you need one! You must establish a working relationship if you expect a response in an emergency situation. An emergency call from a perfect stranger may go completely unanswered, especially if the vet is very busy. Vets are NOT obligated to answer your call. To establish that all important doctor/client relationship first call and talk to the vet. Tell him about your herd, how much goat experience you have, what you intend to do with your goats (just for pets, breeding, showing) and ask what kind of services they offer to goat keepers. Schedule a routine herd health check, have the vet do a brief exam of your goats, show you how to trim feet and give an injection, and run a fecal exam to check for parasites. Now you are a client and you have a vet.

If there is more than one goat vet in your area establish a relationship with all of them at some point. Each vet will have an area of expertise. I have three I can call (its kind of scary that I have their numbers memorized). One of them has very small hands and is very good with difficult deliveries, but doesn't have a clinic for major surgeries, she does animal acupuncture and chiropractic treatments. Another has a beautiful clinic with modern x-ray equipment, is a very good surgeon and an expert at setting and casting broken legs, but his hands are way too big for assisting in a difficult birth, he handles most of my health certificate needs but doesn't really like to make other routine farm calls. Yet another is associated with our nearby veterinary college and loves to bring students out for our once a year USDA testing and herd health day. He is very willing to do routine and emergency on-the-farm surgeries, like adult buck castrations, de-scarring and c-sections.

Livestock vets usually handle their own 24-hour emergency service, they don't have an all night clinic they can send you to like many dog and cat vets do. Most large animal vets use an answering service or voicemail (Boy, cell phones can be truly wonderful), so you have to leave a message. Remember to speak slowly and clearly especially when leaving your call back number. **STAY BY THE PHONE!** It often takes 20 minutes (or more) for the vet to call you back. Consider yourself lucky if your vet's clinic is less than an hour away. Consider yourself lucky if your vet will make farm calls and can get there within an hour. When time is of the essence I call all three of my vets at the same time. Calling several vets at once makes it much more likely you will get one who can respond quickly. I just know that if I have an emergency, I can practically guarantee that my favorite vet is up to her armpits with other emergency calls ahead of me (Murphy's Law applies here). Once you get a vet who can help, let the others off the hook. Either stay by the phone to answer their return call or call back and cancel your emergency.

Be Prepared should be a goat keeper's motto (couldn't resist one last cliché), find your herd a vet today.