

## **Health schemes for Scrapie, CAE and Johnes Disease**

At present goats owned by members of the BGS belong to a variety of health schemes, both 'official' and 'unofficial'. These include the Scrapie Monitored Scheme [SMS] and the CAE Accredited Scheme run by the Scottish Agricultural Colleges [SAC] and the CAE Monitored Scheme run by the BGS. Other herds are whole herd CAE tested so that they can attend BGS shows. This multitude of schemes is confusing and leads to duplication of paperwork and costs.

The intention of all these schemes is to maintain the health status of British goats, to prevent the introduction and/or spread of disease between individual goats and between herds and to facilitate export.

Most BGS members will be aware that the introduction of CAE into the UK with imported goats led to the widespread dissemination of the disease throughout the country in the 1970s and 1980s and that CAE was only controlled by testing and culling of infected animals. Although the incidence of CAE is at present very low, it is a disease that could be spread again very easily by symptomless carrier animals. At present, only goats registered under the SAC CAE Accredited Scheme have any official government status

Until recently, there was a very low incidence of scrapie in the UK and this remains true within the herds of BGS members. However, scrapie has occurred in show and pet herds. Tony Andrews [Chairman of the Goat Veterinary Society] and myself investigated a number of cases [including goats belonging to members of the BGS in the 1980s]. Recently, high levels of scrapie have been reported in two commercial herds, showing that under the right conditions of intensification, even with low levels of infection, scrapie can become a major problem. Worldwide, there seems to be a move towards scrapie eradication.

The incidence of Johnes Disease in British goats has increased in recent years, largely due to increased intensification and the movement of goats between herds on commercial farms. Although the incidence within show herds remains low, infected animals are probably under-reported and the introduction of new goats into any herd could potentially introduce the disease. There is at present no Johnes Disease health scheme for goats in the UK, but the SAC is about to start a pilot scheme to investigate the practicalities of introducing one in the near future.

All the present health schemes have advantages and disadvantages. Cost is a major disincentive to joining and maintaining membership of the schemes and some schemes impose stringent movement restrictions. Showing SAC CAE Accredited Scheme goats is very difficult because the animals need to be kept separated from other animals in the show ring making comparison between animals difficult.

The rules for the Scrapie Monitored Scheme are determined by DEFRA in accordance with the requirements of the EU for export between member states. Export to countries outwith the EU may not require scrapie certification, but, for export to Europe, herds require certification and this is virtually impossible for herds outwith the SMS, unless the herd is closed. The rules of the scheme are not determined by the SAC, who are keen to encourage membership of the scheme. They are aware of the problems caused by the requirement to examine the heads of all culled

goats over 18 months, particularly since the end of the Fallen Stock Scheme, and of the problems of introducing stud males. The SAC and the GVS have discussed the problems at length with DEFRA over the past 6 months and this led to the restrictions on the use of frozen semen being lifted. However, DEFRA is governed by the EU regulations and DEFRA and everyone else in the EU have their hands tied until there is a ruling on a very complicated EU court case between the EU and the French Authorities, who virtually alone in Europe want draconian restrictions introduced to control scrapie in infected herds. Everyone is aware that the whole situation is very unsatisfactory as it stands. The court ruling was due to be published in December, but has been delayed.

In order to simplify the present testing and registration regimes with a view to reducing costs to members and to encourage continuing and new membership, the SAC and the GVS, together with myself as Honorary Veterinary Surgeon for the BGS, have discussed the possibility of amalgamating the existing testing regimes for CAE in an expanded SAC scheme.

The advantages of this would be:

- After the initial amalgamation of schemes was complete, compulsory annual CAE testing for shows would not be necessary and testing could be carried out every 2 years or less in established herds.
- The cost of laboratory tests would be reduced as the SAC offers lower fees for their own scheme than is presently paid by BGS members.
- The SAC Accredited Scheme is internationally recognised, giving British goats a clear increased international health status, making movement of goats abroad easier. Thus for instance, export of goats to the Republic of Ireland would be simpler.
- All goats attending BGS shows would have the same health status, reducing disease risk and allowing any members of the current SAC scheme to show their goats.
- Having all the goats within one scheme makes discussions about rule changes with DEFRA, and ultimately the EU, much easier.
- Presently BGS members need to belong to separate scrapie & CAE monitoring schemes. For those members wanting to monitor both diseases, costs and paperwork would be reduced by belonging to a single accreditation scheme.
- Testing for Johnes Disease could be introduced as 'add-on' test for scheme members

The disadvantages are:

- The annual cost of membership would be higher than the BGS Monitored Scheme, but overall the costs for individual herds would be reduced by the decreased need for blood testing, ie reduced veterinary and laboratory costs.

- There would be increased restrictions on the mixing of untested goats with CAE tested goats, eg for mating. However, giving BGS members goats the same health status will overall facilitate movements.

Recent correspondence in the BGS Journal has shown that there is a diversity of opinions regarding the need for testing and segregation of goats. There will undoubtedly be opposing views within the BGS regarding any change to the present testing regimes, so there is obviously the need for wide-ranging discussion to take place. The **BGS online forum** provides a natural outlet for the exchange of views. Although out-with the normal program, the Annual General Meeting in April could provide a suitable venue for members to express their opinions. The SAC and the GVS can provide speakers as necessary.

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