

Dairy goat welfare in semi-intensive production systems and drought conditions

C Larrondo*[†], J Leiva[‡] and L de la Cruz-Cruz^{§#}

[†] Facultad de Medicina Veterinaria y Agronomía, Universidad de Las Américas, Chile

[‡] Facultad de Ciencias Agropecuarias, Universidad Pedro de Valdivia, Chile

[§] Escuela de Ciencias de la Salud Medicina Veterinaria y Zootecnia, Universidad del Valle de México, México

[#] Preservación del Bienestar Animal/Manejo de la Fauna Silvestre, Departamento de Producción Agrícola, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Calz del Hueso 1100, Coapa, Villa Quietud, Coyoacán, 04960, CDMX, México

* Contact for correspondence: cristian.larrondoc@gmail.com

Abstract

The region of Coquimbo has the highest percentage of goats (Capra hircus) in Chile and is severely affected by droughts. This can lead to environmental challenges such as limited water and forage availability when goats are kept in natural grasslands. The objective of this study was to assess the welfare of dairy goats in semi-intensive production systems under drought conditions. The study was carried out in La Serena city, region of Coquimbo, Chile and 22 semi-intensive dairy goat farms were assessed using the Animal Welfare Indicators protocol. In each evaluation, the following indicators and information were gathered: physical and behavioural indicators of animal welfare, farmers' sociodemographic information, farm facilities, husbandry practices and management of the farm, and farmers' perception of animal welfare. Of the goats evaluated (n = 446), the vast majority had a body condition score (BCS) considered normal (n = 349; 78.25%). The main welfare problems were poor hair condition, faecal soiling, overgrown claws and improper disbudding or dehorning. The majority of farmers (96%) considered it 'rather important' or 'very important' to handle their goats in a gentle manner, expressing concern about the welfare of their animals and considering pain as a negative experience for goats. A lower than expected percentage of very thin animals (low BCS) were seen, considering the drought conditions and the forage shortage that affects the region, and no animals were observed with signs of thermal stress. The semi-intensive production systems could be an alternative to pasture-based systems to overcome environmental challenges.

Keywords: animal welfare, assessment, dairy goats, drought, indicators, perception