



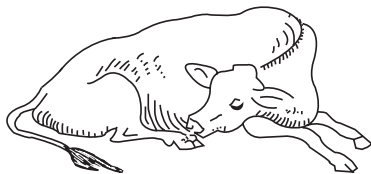
# Is my animal healthy?

## (Cattle, goats and sheep)

*It is important to know if your animal is healthy*

### If you know this, you can

- Treat sick animals.
- Change farming practices that are affecting animal health.
- Decide which animals are too old or sick to keep, and which may be sold or slaughtered.
- Select only healthy animals when buying new ones.



### How to know if your animal is healthy

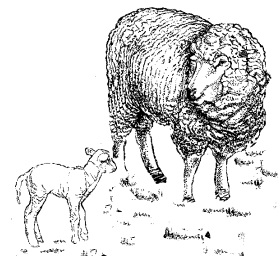
#### *History*

- Did the animal appear sick recently?
- Are any other animals in the herd sick?
- If the animal is mature, what is its breeding history? An old female that has never had young, or a male that has never made females pregnant should not be kept for breeding purposes.

#### *General appearance*

*Look at the animal from a distance without disturbing it*

- If the animal stands apart from the herd it could be a sign of sickness.
- Is the animal eating and drinking well?
- If the animal has a calf/kid/lamb, is she feeding it?
- Does the animal seem excited or depressed? If you intend buying the animal what is its temperament? You do not want to buy an animal that is wild and difficult to handle.
- Can the animal stand or walk properly or is it lame?
- Do you notice obvious problems such as leg problems or an overshot or undershot jaw?
- Are there wounds or swellings?

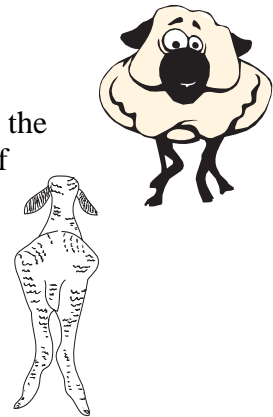


## *Look closely at the animal*

- Is the animal dehydrated? Check by pinching the skin to see if it quickly returns to the normal position. If it does not, the animal is dehydrated, which means it isn't drinking well or is sick. The eyes can also look sunken when an animal is dehydrated.

## Condition

Is the animal in good condition, or too thin, or too fat? Remember to feel the animal, as wool can make sheep look good when they are actually thin. If the animal is in poor condition, has it been like this for some time and are other animals also affected (in which case it may be because of poor nutrition or parasites), or has it suddenly lost weight?



## Coat/wool

There should not be any hair/wool loss, or dullness of coat or wool.

## Skin

Are there any wounds or lumps, or is the animal itching, sweating or scratching and rubbing itself against wire fences?

## Parasites

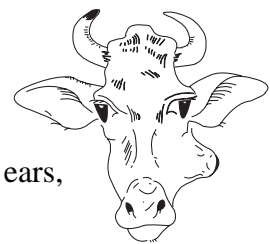
- Check for ticks, lice and mites.
- Some parasites can spread disease such as redwater, gallsickness and heartwater.
- Others can cause loss of hair/wool, anaemia and loss of condition.
- Some ticks can cause severe wounds, which can become infected by flies.
- Check for ticks under the tail, around the udder, in the ear and between the claws.



## *Look at different parts of the body, from head to tail*

### Head and neck

- Is there any swelling of the head or neck?
- Is the head extended or twisted in an unusual way?
- Look at the ears. If they are down in an animal that normally has erect ears, such as a cow, the animal is depressed.

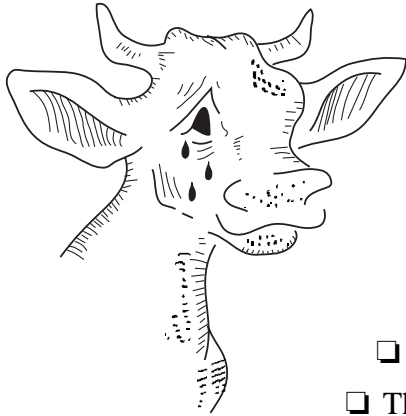


### Mouth

- Check the animal's age by looking at the teeth. Old animals are not very productive and may not be able to eat well because of bad teeth. Are there any other problems with the teeth? Make sure they are not all worn down.
- Is there an increase in the amount of saliva, or other discharges from the mouth?
- Does the animal have difficulty with swallowing, or does food regurgitate from the mouth?
- Are there any sores or bleeding around the mouth or tongue?
- What is the colour of the gums? They should be pink. If the gums are pale (white) or yellow or bluish the animal is sick.

## Nose

- Are there any discharges from the nose? Healthy animals should have a cool and moist nose, with no unusual discharge from the nose.
- Are there any sores or signs of bleeding on the nose?
- Does the breath smell unusual? This can be a sign of bad health.

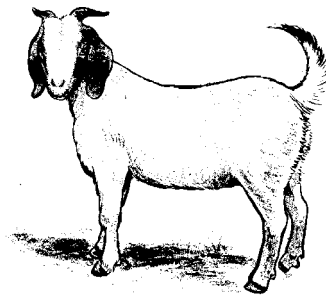


## Eyes

- How do the eyes look? Healthy animals have bright eyes, that are not sunken.
- Are there any discharges from the eyes?
- Draw the eyelid down and look at the colour. It should be the same pink as the gums. A pale or yellow colour can indicate disease.
- The eyes should not be clouded.
- There should not be any growths on the eyelids.

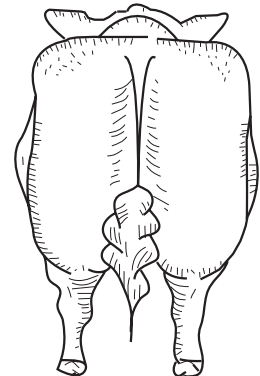
## Chest

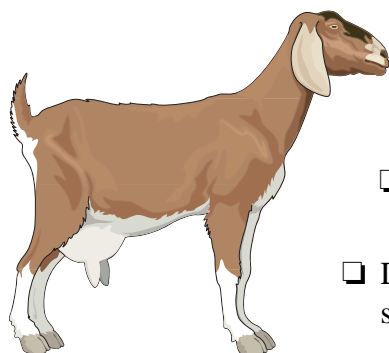
- How is the animal breathing? Is it breathing more often than normal, or deeper than normal, or with its mouth open, or with difficulty and unusual breathing sounds like wheezing?
- The normal number of breaths per minute is:
  - ◆ Cattle 10 to 30
  - ◆ Sheep 10 to 20
  - ◆ Goats 25 to 35
- Does the animal cough or sneeze?



## Belly

- Does the size and shape of the belly look normal?
- Are there any swellings/hernias? Look from the back to see if both sides look the same.
- Check the sheath and penis for abnormal discharge/wounds in males, and the vulva for abnormal discharge or swelling in females.
- Is the animal urinating normally? Check for painful urination, increased frequency of urination, loss of control of urination.
- What does the urine look like? Is it cloudy or does it contain blood or pus? If it has a red colour there is a problem.
- Is the animal passing faeces normally? Is there any straining from constipation? Or does the animal have diarrhoea (watery faeces) which may contain blood? The tail or rear area of animals with diarrhoea is often stained from the faeces.





### *If the animal is a female*

- What does the udder look like?
- Check in a new animal the number of teats and conformation.
- Look for infection in a milking animal: if the milk is very watery, or has clots or blood, or is smelly, then there is infection.
- Does the udder feel hot, is it painful when touched, or is it swollen indicating infection?
- Look for any damage to teats.

### *If the animal is an uncastrated male*

- Check the testicles. There should be 2 and these should be roughly the same size.
- The testicles should feel firm and cool, and should not be swollen or have any wounds.

### Feet

- What is the condition of the feet/hooves? Are the hooves overgrown, or are there signs of infection or a discharge?
- Are the joints swollen?
- Is there any sign of broken bones?



## What to do if there are signs that the animal is sick

- If it is an animal you are thinking to buy, don't buy it.
- If you already have the animal, get advice from a state veterinarian, a private veterinarian, or an animal health technician.
- If the animal is old, or there is a problem which will not easily clear up, cull it.



**For further information, contact your nearest  
animal health technician or veterinarian**

**or**

**Animal Health for Developing Farmers Programme  
at the ARC–Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute  
Tel (012) 529 9158**

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