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My name is Dr. Daniela Castillo. I have been a licensed veterinarian in Mexico since 2008. I became licensed in the state of California in 2016. I have experience treating farm animals, including goats, during veterinary school and at animal sanctuaries in the San Fernando Valley.

Overview:

I was asked to review necropsy reports and footage from Vera Goat Dairy in Stratford, California. Vera Goat Dairy houses around 9,000 goats at any one time for the purpose of milk production. Investigators found goats suffering from significant malnourishment and zoonotic bacteria. The facility hosts a dead pile on site which improperly disposes of deceased goats. This dead pile attracts different animal species who then may contract and further spread disease.

Disease Findings:

Two deceased, juvenile goats were removed from a pile of dead goats on the Vera Goat Dairy property and taken to a California Animal Health and Food Safety (CAHFS) laboratory. Investigators shared the necropsy reports with me.

CAHFS found that both goats were in a state of decay and were infested with maggots. Prior to death, they had suffered from severe emaciation, meaning that they were extremely thin and malnourished. Their muscles were atrophied, and their bodies had no fat reserves. These findings are consistent with chronically poor health and disease, along with inadequate access to nutrients.

Both goats tested positive for *Coccidia* oocysts. *Coccidia* is a protozoal parasite which invades the intestinal lining- leading to poor nutrient absorption and often blood loss. Young goats such as these are at higher risk of serious and even fatal outcomes. Given the condition these goats were in, it is likely that the *coccidia* infection was a significant cause of their morbidity.

Laboratory Findings / Diagnosis

Two goat kids, found dead with no previous signs of illness.

Diagnosis

- Emaciation, 2/2.
- Suppurative and fibrinous bronchopneumonia, 1/2. Most likely etiology: *Escherichia coli*.

Other findings:

- Fecal exam flotation (feces): *Coccidia* oocysts detected, 2/2.
- Heavy metal and Selenium screen (liver): See toxicology section.

Gross Observations

Necropsy of two goat kids (A: 16.6 lbs., female, B: 10.4 lbs., female.) began at 11:00 a.m. on April 14, 2025.

Goat A:

The carcass was in poor nutritional condition with no fat reserves and severe muscle atrophy, and severe state of postmortem decomposition, and severe maggot infestation. No gross lesions were observed in the carcass.

Goat B:

The carcass was in poor nutritional condition with no fat reserves, muscle atrophy and in severe state postmortem decomposition with severe maggot infestation. There was consolidation of the antero-ventral lobe of the right lung with fibrin on the surface. A large amount of stable froth was present in the trachea. No other significant gross abnormalities were observed in the rest of the carcass.

CAHFS found that "Goat A" had some mineralization present in her kidney. Among other factors, this could be a result of an inappropriate diet, water with high mineral content, or a lack of available fresh water. The presence of mineralization in the kidney of a juvenile goat is abnormal and raises specific, flock-wide animal welfare and health concerns pertaining to their urinary systems.

CAHFS found that "Goat B" had suppurative and fibrinous bronchopneumonia, most likely caused by *Escherichia coli* bacteria. In layman's terms, parts of her right lung were filled with pus. CAHFS wrote that "There was consolidation of the anteroventral lobe of the right lung with fibrin on the surface. A large amount of stable froth was present in the trachea." Given the presence of *E. coli*, it is likely that this infection resulted from the ingestion of feces. This could be a result of feces on the kid's source of food (either the nipple of a milk bottle or a doe's udder) or high levels of feces contaminating her environment. This raises significant concerns regarding the welfare and hygiene standards at Vera Goat Dairy. It is also notable that *E. coli* is contagious between species and could spread to other animals on the property as well as humans.

H i s t o l o g y

Sections of brain, heart, lung, liver, kidney, spleen, and GI tract are examined.

Goat A:

Kidney: some tubules are mineralized.

Goat B:

Lung: the alveoli, bronchioles, and bronchi contain a large number of neutrophils and, in a lesser extent, fibrin. The blood vessels are congestive.

All tissues have severe autolysis, which makes the microscopic exam difficult. No other relevant histologic alterations were seen in the rest of the organs and tissues examined.

During the course of the investigation of Vera Goat Dairy, investigators informed me that they came across a baby goat ("Castiel") who was laying on the ground, apparently weak and lethargic. He had nasal discharge and was reluctant to stand. Veterinary records for Castiel show that he was later diagnosed with pneumonia and polyarthritis, the painful inflammation of multiple joints. Castiel also tested positive for *Salmonella*, another bacteria that can sicken both humans and animals.

The Dead Pile:

Investigators sent me footage of a large, uncovered pile of goat carcasses on the site of Vera Goat Dairy. The improper disposal of deceased animals poses a major biosecurity risk. Deceased animals should be incinerated or properly composted in a way which allows their bodies to reach a temperature that kills bacteria and viruses.



This massive number of dead animals is indicative of widespread disease and illness. Given the necropsy results and Castiel's diagnoses, it is confirmed that at least both *E. coli* and *Salmonella* infections are present at Vera Goat Dairy.



Footage shows dogs on the property eating the bodies of these goats. Cattle graze around the dead pile and birds swarm around it. These animals could become infected with parasites, bacteria, and viruses from the corpses. These animals could also spread other diseases to each other as they all convene around the dead pile. Also concerning, the spread of pathogens between species could lead to bacteria and viruses mutating. Mutations can result in the development of even more contagious and deadly strains of pathogens.

**General Welfare:**

Footage from Vera Goat Dairy shows a doe's udders as her newborn kid attempts to nurse. Her mammary glands are abnormally inflamed, indicating the presence of mastitis, an infection of the mammary glands. Her baby can be seen attempting to nurse but is unable to latch onto her teat due to the abnormal swelling. In the first 24 hours after a goat is born, it is crucial that they are able to nurse to get colostrum. Not receiving colostrum can lead to failure of passive transfer of antibodies, which is when babies don't have sufficient defenses to protect them from diseases. Veterinarians who treated Castiel, a baby goat rescued from Vera Goat Dairy, commented that he appeared to have failure of passive transfer of antibodies.



Drone footage from Vera Goat Dairy shows that goats are confined in barren pens without access to pasture. The goats are unable to forage for fresh grass or other greenery. When given the option to do so, healthy goats will typically travel several miles per-day. They enjoy climbing rocks and steep hills. Notably, confinement to small pens leads to fecal contamination and seeds the limited environment with heavy loads of parasites, viruses, and

bacteria.



Goat kids at Vera Goat Dairy are separated from their mothers within a few days of birth. While standard on many goat dairies, this is a practice that has negative welfare implications for both the mother and kid. The separation causes severe distress. Kids are supposed to stay with their moms for many months to nurse and learn from them.

Conclusion:

The evidence I reviewed indicates systemic management problems at the Vera Goat Dairy. Newborn goat kids must be closely monitored to ensure they receive colostrum. Failure of passive transfer of antibodies results in sick goat kids with virtually no ability to fight off disease. The dead pile is a concerning sign of high mortality and poor management practices. Sick, starving goat kids inevitably suffer unnecessarily. The proliferation of microorganisms at the facility puts both animal and human health at risk. Sick does are likely to have higher bacterial counts in their milk. This poses a public health risk and potentially exposes human workers to zoonotic disease. It is my opinion that the relevant law enforcement agencies should investigate this facility as immediately as possible and address any violations of animal welfare law and public health law.

Signed,

Dr. Daniela Castillo, DVM, MS

Daniela Castillo 