

CHAPTER 9

Working dog health

This chapter deals with the basics of health, housing and transport of working dogs. The health and welfare of working dogs can be overlooked, and yet they are an integral part of the labour force of the farm. Working dogs contribute many hours of labour, so care should be taken to ensure that dogs can work to the best of their ability.

Working dogs require routine care including adequate housing and shelter, nutrition, vaccination, regular worm control (including heartworm prevention in some areas), control of fleas and desexing if dogs are not intended to be used for breeding.

Desexing

Dogs of all ages can be desexed. It is now commonplace for pups to be desexed as they leave the litter. The procedure usually only involves 1 day at the veterinary clinic and the recovery period is short (10 to 14 days). Early desexing prevents roaming in males and the problem of bitches coming on heat. Desexing before sexual maturity also ensures that diseases that may occur later in the dog's life – including mammary cancer, uterine pyometra and prostate disease – are much less likely to occur.

Bitches begin cycling at 6 months of age; if they are to have pups, they should not be bred until after their second heat (that is, until 18 months of age). Male dogs are generally sexually mature from 7 months of age or sometimes younger.

Vaccination

Vaccination protects dogs against fatal diseases such as parvovirus, distemper and hepatitis. A veterinarian can advise on appropriate vaccination schedules.

Viruses can spread within the dog population as quickly as the human cold spreads from person to person. Wild dogs and foxes can spread viruses to working dogs. Isolation on the farm is no pro-