

Goat and Sheep Production – Basics of Feeding Fact Sheet

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Goats and sheep are ruminant animals with a four chambered stomach made for digesting forages like pasture, forbs/weeds, browse and hay. However, forages may not always provide them what they need. The following information provides some basic tips for feeding goats and sheep.

- Excellent pasture and animal management is required for pasture-based systems, but supplemental feeding will probably still be needed at some point.
- Management tips include:
 - Manage animals in groups by age or production status for nutrition and health reasons.
 - Use integrated parasite management for multiple methods of worm control.
 - Do not over-graze - three to five adults per acre of good forage is the recommendation.
 - Rotationally graze for the best forage quality; as forage matures, quality goes down.
 - Mow pastures to maintain forage quality as needed.
 - Graze at no less than four inches of forage height for parasite control.
 - Use browse (brush/woody forage) when available for goats; sheep will eat some weeds but generally like to graze.
 - Soil sample and fertilize pastures based on forage needs.
- Some animals need extra protein and/or energy, usually given as a grain-based feed:
 - Young animals (less than a year of age) need more protein and energy.
 - Feeding extra energy to females two to four weeks prior to breeding and two weeks after may help increase number of offspring born.
 - Four to six weeks prior to giving birth, pregnant animals need extra energy because the babies are growing very fast then.
 - Females nursing offspring need more energy; the more offspring nursing, the more energy needed.
- Loose, not block, minerals made for your species should be available at all times; give sheep only minerals (and feed) made for them due to issues with copper toxicity.
- Fresh, clean water should be available at all times.
- Do not feed directly on the ground; keep feeders clean.
- Provide plenty of feeder space when feeding hay or grain.
- Learn about and use body condition scoring (scores of 1 to 5 with 1=too thin and 5=obese):
 - It is best to feed for scores between 2 and 4.
 - Animals with poor body condition should be fed more.
 - Pregnant animals should be no higher than a 4 to avoid possible pregnancy toxemia.



For more information, contact your local County Extension Center or Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension Program (478-825-6296).