

Fundamentals of Feeding Goats

FARM ANIMAL FIELD SERVICES

Proper nutrition is the cornerstone of a healthy goat herd. Goats' feeding requirements and diet preferences are different from other ruminants such as sheep and cattle. A goat's diet should center around fresh forage and/or good quality hay. Goats that have a higher energy need will greatly benefit from the addition of concentrates or grain as a supplement to their diet. Other important management practices such as maintaining an appropriate stocking density (number of animals per acre), preventing disease, and minimizing stressors are also crucial for a healthy herd. Work with your veterinarian to design a feeding strategy that works for your goat.

Concentrates

Concentrates or grain should be fed to goats with higher energy requirements. This includes goats that are still growing (i.e. weanlings), pregnant, or lactating.

- Feed a concentrate formulated for goats to ensure that it is adequately balanced to meet their specific needs.
- Feed concentrate once or twice per day. Smaller, more frequent meals help maintain rumen health and prevent ruminal acidosis, a potentially deadly condition.
- Separate goats based on production stage (i.e. pregnant, lactating, or growing) to allow time to consume an increased volume of feed without competition.
- A good place to start is 0.5-1 lb grain per day of a 14-16% protein goat concentrate. Utilize stage of production and body condition scoring to further tailor the amount of grain for individuals.
- Dry does, wethers (castrated goats), and non-breeding bucks can have a small handful of grain as a treat, but do not need concentrates to meet their nutritional needs. Excessive grain consumption can put wethers at an increased risk of urinary stones and should be avoided.
- If concentrates are fed, free-choice baking soda should be made available. Concentrates can make the rumen more acidic leading to problems such as laminitis and liver abscesses. Baking soda will help offset ruminal acidosis by providing a buffer.

Forages

Goats are browsers and will selectively eat the leafy and woody portions of plants that other ruminants will not eat. Although goats will graze on pastures, they much prefer eating brush along fence lines or broadleaf weeds known as forbs.

- Dry matter intake for goats at maintenance is a minimum of 1-3% of their body weight every day.
- Supplement with good quality hay in the winter or anytime of year the pasture is poor.
- Feed in a manger with a trough to decrease waste and parasite exposure. Maintain adequate bunk space of 16 inches per goat to allow for adequate access to the forage.
- Forage testing is the only way to truly know the nutrient quality of your hay and can be done through UT Extension. Generally, good quality hay will be green, soft, dry, sweet-smelling, and free from mold and excessive dust. ***Information about your county's extension office can be found at utextension.tennessee.edu***

Additional Needs

- Minerals: Free-choice minerals should be available at all times. Select a mineral formulated for goats to ensure proper quantities and avoid accidental toxicity. Feed this in a feed tub or bowl mounted to the wall to prevent it from being spilled.
- Water: Allow free access to fresh water at all times.

