

Nutrition and Health Considerations for Lamb and Goat Projects

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In my last two blog posts I discussed Project Budgeting and Animal Selection. The next step in the sequence is to look at Nutrition and Health Considerations. To this point you should have planned your expenses for the project, have your facilities in place, understand what you are looking for in an animal, and are ready to bring one home. Nutrition and health are a major component in having a successful livestock project. You can buy the best lamb or goat in the country but if he doesn't get a strong feeding and health program it is just money wasted. Good feed helps an animal reach his genetic growth potential and good healthcare makes sure he stays alive and eating that good feed.

First let's talk about nutrition. Sheep and goats have five basic nutrient requirements: water, protein, fats and carbohydrates, minerals, and vitamins. Let's take a closer look at each one.

- 1) Water- It composes more than 70% of lean tissue in your animal and must be replenished every day. Keep it clean and fresh. If you wouldn't drink it, it's probably a good idea to change it out and clean the trough or bucket. Make sure it's available at all times and in the summer make sure it's in the shade. Winter time may mean extra trips to the barn to thaw or refilling. The only time you may need to withhold water is close to show date when you may be trying to reduce the size of the rumen for the sake of appearance.
- 2) Protein- Very important in growth performance in lambs and goats. Without protein it is not possible to develop muscle. Generally, a balanced ration with 16-18% protein is adequate to keep your animals moving forward. Overfeeding protein can become quite expensive as the animal only needs a certain amount each day. Extra protein is used for energy and there are other feed components that are more economically feasible.
- 3) Carbohydrates and Fat- Work in tandem with protein to achieve good growth rates. They provide the energy required at the cellular level. Again, this nutrient needs to

- be balanced as well. Too much is just as bad as not enough. In your ration, grains such as corn, wheat, and barley make up most of the carbohydrate sources.
- 4) Minerals- The three minerals of concern in lamb or goat rations are salt, calcium, and phosphorus. Calcium and Phosphorus are important to proper growth and development but too much phosphorus can cause urinary calculi so ammonium chloride is normally added to the ration to take care of this problem.
 - 5) Vitamins- usually only needed in small amounts. Vitamin A is normally the only vitamin lacking in a ration but a handful of alfalfa daily or feeding an alfalfa based ration will supply any deficiency. Another good practice is to give an occasional shot of a B complex.

**Just a note on feeding hay.

Feeding small quantities of good hay is a good practice to keep the rumen functioning properly but remember your animal is only going to consume a certain amount of material in a day. You want to make sure everything he takes in is driving him to his potential. A good balanced ration is the best way to keep him growing.

Okay, now let's assume you have your goat in the barn. You have done your homework and found a good source for a well-balanced and fresh ration. What is the next step? Unless you have current records from the seller, assume that your lamb or goat has had no prior health care. Remember that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure so now we will establish a good preventative maintenance protocol to keep our project healthy and growing.

- 1) The first thing I will address is the removal internal parasites. Remember you want your animal to grow- not be a buffet for critters living on the inside of him. You have too much time and money invested to overlook this part of your program. Check with your veterinarian on the most effective deworming protocol. I recommend catching a fresh stool sample and having it analyzed to determine what species of parasite you could potentially be dealing with.
- 2) Enterotoxaemia-(Overeating Disease)- This can be a major cause of death in show lambs and goats. Abrupt changes in diet (what ration was he fed before you bought him compared to what you choose to feed him now), or rations with high grain content can cause this. Clostridial organisms already present in the intestines begin to grow rapidly and produce a toxin that can kill in just a few hours so you the only symptom you see is a dead goat or sheep. You should vaccinate for Enterotoxemia types C & D. Again consult a veterinarian for best practices.

- 3) Urinary Calculi- This basically the formation of stones in the urinary tract in goats. A high phosphorus diet is the main culprit. The best prevention is to make sure the ration has 10-15 lbs. (or .5%-.75%) of ammonium chloride.
- 4) Ringworm- is highly contagious from animal to animal and animal to human. Prevention is the best method. Fulvicin powder, Novasan, or a 10% bleach solution will work to varying degrees.

Other health and maintenance concerns may include tail docking (lambs), horn removal, and hoof trimming. Normally, club lamb breeders do this very early in a lamb's life so it may not be an issue for you. If it must be done make sure you don't get it too short it could cause rectal prolapse. Horns will also normally be removed early but it is possible that you could encounter scurs. The best method of dealing with scurs is to have your veterinarian surgically remove them. Hoof trimming will be an ongoing process and should be normally done about once every four to six weeks. As you get closer to show time remember to trim no later than a week beforehand to ensure he has time to heal up if you cut a little too close. If you are feeding a lamb or goat during the hottest part of the summer it might be wise to keep hair and wool length fairly short to help keep them cool. There is no need to clip to show length as sunburn could become an issue. Also, keep pens clean and dry to minimize disease incidence and have a good fly control protocol in place. I will say more about show prep and conditioning in a later blog but it will be important that you spend time with your lambs and goats throughout the feeding period. Halter break them as early as possible. This will allow you to handle them easier as they continue to grow. Vaccinations, drenching, hoof trimming, and clipping will all be much easier as the animal becomes more comfortable with you handling them. Until next time, put what we have discussed into practice and we will talk about exercise, fitting, and showmanship a little later.