

Feeding Bucks to Prepare for the Breeding Season, and Beyond

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Bucks should enter the breeding season in good body condition without excessive fat. They should be maintained at a pre-breeding body condition score of 3 to 4 because they may lose more than 10% of their body weight during breeding season. Condition scores should be assessed as a part of a breeding soundness evaluation about 2 months before breeding. It is usually beneficial to feed a concentrated energy-protein supplement to the males beginning about 4-6 weeks before the breeding season. Depending on the body condition and size of the male, 1 to 2 lbs. of concentrate usually suffices. A good quality supplement for grass based forage is 80% corn and 20% soybean meal. After the breeding season some concentrate may need to be fed to help the buck regain an adequate body condition. For the remainder of the year, adult males can be fed at a maintenance level. If grass forage is fed, animals should have free access to a mixture of 50% dicalcium phosphate 50% trace mineral salt. If legumes are a significant portion of the diet, a mixture of 50% trace mineral salt, 25% dicalcium phosphate, and 25% deflorinated rock phosphate can be offered. In both instances, these mineral salt mixtures should be the only source of salt offered to encourage adequate intake. The trace mineral component should be designed for the local soil type. Goats can usually consume trace mineral mixtures made for cattle. Because of the possibility of urolithiasis in males, the keeper should take steps to prevent stone formation by adding ammonium chloride or other urine acidifiers to the mineral mixture.

Feeding Does for the Breeding Season

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At the time of breeding, the practice of flushing the females has been used with some success. The basic premise is that increased nutrition, specifically energy, just before and during the early breeding season increases the ovulation rate and therefore the lambing or kidding rate. The female's age and body condition at the time of year all affect the response to flushing. Mature females in marginal body condition usually respond best to flushing. Moreover, the practice appears to be more beneficial when trying to breed the group early or late as opposed to during the peak of breeding season. Over-conditioned females either do not respond or appear to respond only marginally to flushing. Flushing can be accomplished by the provision of lush pastures or by supplementation with about 1/3 to 1 lb of a 10%-12% crude protein grain per head per day. It is best to begin approximately 2 weeks before the males are introduced and continue for an additional 2-3 weeks into the breeding season.

The effects of flushing include increased body condition, increased ovulation rate, and increased number of kids born. Adequate body condition is necessary for acceptable conception rates. Outside certain biologic limits a flushing effect cannot be observed. For example, as extremely thin (score of 1) female would probably not have an increased ovulation rate because she is too thin to have normal cycles. However, within normal ranges (2.5 to 3) the ovulation rate appears to respond to a short duration increase in energy, and, to a lesser extent, to increased protein intake. Flushing does not always increase kidding rates; however, it does increase the number of females cycling early in the breeding season, resulting in a greater proportion of the offspring

being born early in the kidding season. Females at or just under a body condition score of 2.5 to 3 are optimal for most breeding herds.