

Feeding Does for the Breeding Season

From Sheep and Goat Medicine, by D.G. Pugh, DVM with permission

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.