

LACTATION

Lactation is the period when the ewe or doe produces milk. It typically lasts for several months, with the length varying based on different factors such as breed and management. The female's nutritional requirements are highest during lactation, especially if she is nursing multiples or is a high producing dairy animal (parlor-milked).



Colostrum is the first milk produced after parturition. It is rich in nutrients and maternal antibodies. The mother will produce colostrum only in the last few days of pregnancy and into the first 18 hours after giving birth.

Goat milk has higher somatic cell counts (SSC) than cow milk; sheep milk is intermediate. While somatic cell count is an indicator of udder health and milk quality, it is more complex in goats.

Goats usually have longer lactations and produce more milk with a different composition than sheep. Sheep milk is higher in total solids (fat and protein). The sheep's lactation curve is shorter and steeper. Milk production in goats drops off more gradually.

Factors affecting milk production

- Breed
- Genetics
- Parity (age)
- Number of offspring
- Nutrition
- Health
- Management
- Environment

Animal	Length	Peak	Daily	Solids
Meat and wool sheep	4 to 6 months	3 to 4 weeks	3 to 5 lbs.	18 %
Dairy sheep	4 to 8 months	3 to 4 weeks	4 to 8 lbs.	18 %
Meat and fiber goat	Up to 6 months	4 to 9 weeks	2 to 6 lbs.	11-13 %
Dairy goat	Up to 10 months	4 to 6 weeks	6 to 12 lbs.	11-13 %