Year-round feeding of ewes and does

Year-round feeding of ewes and does requires tailoring their diet to meet their needs during their different stages of production using the feed resources available. Feeding programs can vary significantly from farm to farm and by size of operation. Forage diets are typically fed, with grains and/or other feedstuffs supplemented to meet the increased demands of reproduction. For accelerated mating systems the production cycle is usually 2 years.

Maintenance is the period when the ewe/doe is neither pregnant nor lactating. She only needs to maintain her body weight or slowly regain the weight she lost during lactation. Her nutritional requirements aren't very high and can usually be met with pasture or grass hay. Females on accelerated mating programs have significantly shorter maintenance periods.

Proper nutrition during late gestation (last 4 to 6 weeks) is the most critical because this is when the fetuses are doing their majority of their growing. The female is also making milk. Nutrient requirements increase significantly, especially for females with multiple fetuses. Mostly ewes/does require a more nutrient-dense diet. This usually involves some grain feeding. Calcium requirements increase throughout pregnancy in goats and peak in late gestation for sheep.

Lactation places the greatest nutritional demand on ewes/does, especially those nursing multiple offspring or being raised for dairy purposes. Energy and protein requirements are substantially higher compared to other periods during the production cycle. Milk production peaks at 3 to 4 weeks in ewes and tapers off more gradually in goats. Most females lose weight during lactation.
The drying off period (weaning or end of lactation) is another important time for nutrition. Ewes/does must be fed and managed properly to prevent mastitis.

Nutritional requirements during the breeding season aren't that much higher than for maintenance. Flushing may increase ovulation rates in some females, especially those that have not recovered sufficiently from their last lactation (BCS ≤ 2). Flushing is when you provide supplemental nutrition, usually in the form of energy (grain), to females prior to and during the early part of the breeding season.

Nutrition during early to mid gestation is vital because this is when the placenta is developing. Requirements aren't much higher than maintenance, but prolonged underfeeding can affect placental development, and overfeeding can lead to many negative consequences for both dam and offspring.

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