

Pastures, forbs and browse plants should be utilized on a rotational basis, remembering that goats prefer to browse rather than graze in mixed plant populations. Therefore, it is advisable to limit acreage of pastures and browse to what the goat can use during periods of lush growth; e.g., during spring. Utilizing grazing and browsing areas on a weekly basis should prevent over-grazing and allow for quality over quantity.

The usefulness of pastures, browse and forbs in a meat goat enterprise will depend on knowing their average annual yields per acre in addition to their protein and TDN values (Pinkerton et al. 1992). Therefore, it is difficult to answer such basic management questions concerning grazing density (head/acre), optimal grazing patterns (frequency and duration, and needs for supplemental feeding (protein, energy and minerals) (Pinkerton et al. 1992). Several rules of thumb for grazing can be typically applied; e.g., 8-10 mature goats on improved pastures or 12-15 goats on pasture, forbs and browse on a rotational basis.

Forage Supplementation

In situations where the available forage (pastures, forbs and browse) is insufficient in nutrients (protein, energy and minerals) to support desirable levels of goat performance, it would be advisable to offer supplements. However, supplementation will depend on the cost/benefit to be derived from such a practice. Adequate protein must be offered to maintain adequate goat performance. Feeding hay of a sufficient protein level (a pound or so of 20% crude protein cubes or 0.5 lbs of 40% CP supplement or 0.5 -1.0 lb of whole cottonseed) may be economically sound and nutritionally adequate (Pinkerton et al 1992).

Phosphorous is necessary for reproduction and milk production. Therefore, supplementation is usually an economical practice. Many meat goat producers provide minerals on a year round basis. The minerals offered may be in the form of trace mineralized salt, calcium and/or phosphorous as individual sources or in combination with salt, or commercial mineral mixtures.

Energy is needed for adequate conception rates, milk flow and kid growth rates. When existing forages are low in energy, many meat goat producers offer 0.5 to 1 lb of cracked corn or whole cottonseed.

The utilization of forages (pasture, forbs and browse) and supplements in a meat goat enterprise will largely depend on the cost/benefit of such a practice. The progressive meat goat producer should want optimal performance from his animals, and the input of nutrients must be ample to bring this about. Cash income from a meat goat enterprise is derived from the sale of kids and culled adults. Therefore, the norm should be the utilization of forages on a year round, rotational basis with only mineral supplementation. All other practices may increase cost but would likely be economically wise.

Pasture Management

Many of the pasture establishment and management practices will vary from area to area, depending on soil types, elevation, growing season, rainfall and drainage. Also, many factors influence the choice of grasses, grains, legumes and a combination of the three. Some of these factors are:

- Natural adaptation of the plants (do they grow well in your area and on your soil?)
- Managerial ability or capability of the meat goat producer (some varieties of pasture crops need more intense care, fertilization, clipping and controlled grazing than others).
- Available money to invest in pasture establishment.
- How will the crop be used? (For pastures alone, for pasture and hay, for hay alone, to be grazed heavily and continuously or rotationally grazed).

Some management tips for goats on pasture are to provide:

- Adequate water and shade.
- Mineral mix and trace mineral salt. Do not mix salt and minerals together. Salt, being quite tasty, may encourage the animals to eat greater amounts of the mineral mix than is desirable or needed.
- Ready access to hay, especially when pastures are making little or no growth. Also, the quality of pastures changes each day resulting in low energy levels.