

Nutritional Flushing of Sheep and Goats

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Nutritional flushing of ewes/does is the technique by which we can increase the plane of nutrition, most commonly by increasing the energy available in the diet, likely increasing ovulation rates during breeding time, leading to higher lambing and kidding rates. This technique is simple and relatively cheap to implement in any operation, from farm flock to range.

To implement this technique in your operation, we must first have some nutritional management guidelines prior to breeding.

1. To have an effective flush, the females cannot be over-conditioned going into the increased plane of nutrition. The body condition scores (BCS) should not exceed a 3 for best results. The typical range of BCS for successful flushing usually falls between a 2.25 to 3.

2. A helpful tool for BCS scoring sheep can be reached at this link:

<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/management-reproduction/condition-scoring-sheep>

The following link is for BCS scoring goats <https://goats.extension.org/goat-body-condition-score/>

3. Successful flushing typically increases the energy available to the ewes/does by 1.2 to 1.8 times the energy requirements of the female. This can usually be achieved by feeding a grain source at 1 to 1.5 pounds per head per day or by turning out on lush forage at proper stocking rates. However, adjustments might have to be made for optimal success by operation.

4. Lastly, flushing diets should be fed for 2 to 4 weeks prior to breeding for best results and the same can be done with the rams/billy. The added condition can be maintained if ewes/does reach a BCS of 3, however, if flushed to greater than a 3 (3.5 to 4), it is highly encouraged that their condition gradually be reduced following breeding.

Overall, flushing is a relatively simple and affordable technique that can be implemented in almost any operation with success. Lambing and kidding rates typically increase by 10 to 30% when flushing occurs, therefore, in most situations, the extra cost of grain for this short time of supplementation likely pays for itself in most cases. In conclusion, by adding extra nutritional management, the overall productivity and efficiency of ewes/does can be increased.

For more information, please contact the local K-State Research and Extension Office.

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