SUMMARY OF FEEDING AND MANAGING KID GOATS FOR MEAT ON GRAIN RATIONS

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Pre-weaning

There are many different facilities being used to raise kid goats for meat. Most of these facilities can be made to work. However, there are some common key factors that will help to contribute to the success in feeding and managing kid goats.

1. Late gestation does need to be fed correctly to ensure adequate birth weight and colostrum production.
2. The facility needs to be clean, dry and comfortable. Sanitation is important to help prevent disease in young kids.
3. The facility needs to have good ventilation but no draughts. Need to remove stale air, ammonia and control moisture.
4. Feed kids good quality colostrum as soon after birth as possible, preferably within the first two hours after birth.
5. Feed milk replacer or milk (goats or cows – there may be some disease transmission considerations). The milk can be fed "sweet" or acidified.
6. Feed **Shur-Gain 20% Kid Goat Starter Ration** to promote early rumen development. Start feeding at 3 to 5 days of age. Feed small amounts initially. Feed and clean the feeder out daily and watch for soiled or stale feed.
7. Provide clean fresh water at all times from a pail. Providing warm water initially may encourage earlier water and starter consumption. This will help promote early starter intake and rumen development.

Weaning

Kids can usually be weaned successfully at 6 to 8 weeks of age. Wean gradually from milk. Ensure that the kids are consuming at least 100 to 150 grams/head/day of **Shur-Gain 20% Kid Starter Ration.**

Transition the kids to **Shur-Gain 17% Kid Goat Developer Ration** after weaning and feed for 2 to 4 weeks depending on how the kids are responding and growing. Then transition the kids to the **Shur-Gain 15% Billy Goat Gro-Fin Ration** till they are shipped (usually 60lb weight). Alternatively, blend the 20% Kid Starter Ration with the 15% Billy Goat Gro-Fin Ration (50:50) and feed for 2 to 4 weeks, then transition to the 15% Billy Goat Gro-Fin Ration till the animals are shipped.

Introduce good quality, mold free grassy hay and feed it separately from the grain ration. Hay should not be more than 5 – 8% of the total diet. Provide clean, fresh water at all times – this is critically important to the success of finishing billy goats. Feed a salt block free choice.

Post weaning

Feeding kids for optimum gain, feed efficiency and profitability can be a challenge. There are several essential components to help ensure success. These include the facility where kids are to be fed, the feeding and management of animals and potential diseases that may occur in feeder kids. There are a number of very important aspects to consider when feeding kids.

Key facility requirements for finishing meat goats

1. **Kid feeding facility.** Kids need a clean, dry and comfortable environment, well ventilated to remove the stale air (including ammonia), but free of draughts. Protect kids from the cold by providing supplementary heat and shelter.
2. **Pen space required for kids.** Kids require 0.5 - 0.75 square meters (5 - 8 square feet) floor space. Floor space required also depends on the temperature, amount of sunlight and moisture. Most kid goats are fed in pens that are well bedded with straw.
3. **Trough or bunk space.** Kids must have at least 10 cm (4 inches) feed trough space per kid. The feed trough must be thoroughly cleaned once per day to avoid stale or moldy feed buildup. Forcing kids to clean the feed trough will result in slower and more variable growth.
4. **Water requirements for kids.** Kids must have at least 1 cm (about 0.5 inch) of linear water trough space per kid. Small water bowls have been used successfully as well. There must be at least two water points per group of kids. The water must be clean and fresh at all times.
5. **Grouping kids.** Feed kids in groups no larger than 20 - 30 animals. Kids are often fed in smaller groups in practice. Group kids by size/weight. Uniform groups help reduce the negative effects of social dominance and promote more rapid and even gains.
6. **Hot and cold weather.** Kids hyperventilate to help cool body temperature in hot weather. Adequate ventilation in barns is very important. Provide protection against cold – too much feed energy is wasted just keeping kids warm.

Important feeding and management related problems

Feeder kids are susceptible to several economically important diseases related to the feeding and management of the animals. The most important are acidosis, scours, pulpy kidney (enterotoxaemia) urinary calculi coccidiosis and pneumonia. The occurrence of any of these diseases can result in serious financial loss through high mortality and/or treatment costs.

Prevention is the key to managing the risk of any of these diseases occurring in feeder kids. Some common measures include:

Facility

- **Facility.** Provide animals with a clean, dry and comfortable environment. Good ventilation is important but avoid draughts in the facility. Where possible allow sunlight in for part of the day to help dry out the pens. Watch for leaks around the water troughs. Remove or cover wet areas.
- **Avoid faecal contamination of the water and feed.** Clean the feed and water troughs out daily. The correct design of feed troughs and water points can help reduce faecal contamination.

The Ration

- **Ration mineral levels.** Feed moderate to low levels of Phosphorus and Magnesium in the total ration. Feed a ration with calcium to phosphorus ratio of 2.2:1 to 2.5:1. Feed moderately higher levels of salt to encourage higher water intake. Also offer salt free choice in the form of block salt. Ensure there is adequate fresh clean water available.
- **Feed a urine acidifier.** This helps prevent crystal formation and accumulation in the urinary tract.
- **Include an ionophore in the ration.** An ionophore such as Bovatec or Rumensin will improve feed efficiency and lower the cost of gain (and may help minimize the risk of acidosis and bloat). Veterinary prescription is required.
- **Access to hay.** Kids that have access to hay free choice will consume some hay as part of their ration. This results in more chewing and saliva production, which in turn helps buffer the rumen. May have to limit hay if the intakes are higher than 5 – 8% of total daily intake.
- **Include buffers in the ration.** If necessary, buffers can be added to the ration. Including yeast in the ration can be helpful, particularly during the summer months.

Feeding management

- **Adapt kids to grain rations gradually.** It takes about 7 – 10 days to fully adapt kids to a grain ration. Kids already on a creep ration are easier to transition to a grower ration.
- **Avoid slug feeding grain.** Once kids are on grain make sure they do not run out of feed. Avoid making kids “clean up” the bunk. Kids are fastidious feeders and forcing them to clean up the bunk will reduce feed intake and predispose them to overeating when new feed is fed.
- **Bunk management is key.** Excellent bunk management is essential to ensure that kids stay on feed throughout the feeding period and have a consistent grain intake.
- **Keep the animals clean.** Animals can become infected by licking contaminated hair coat. Pens must be kept clean, dry and well bedded.
- **Water supply is important.** Free access to clean fresh water is extremely important!

General Management

- **Vaccinate.** Vaccinate against pulpy kidney using a clostridial vaccine - follow label directions carefully.
- **Avoid stress.** Avoid stress on animals especially when animals are moved, mingled or first brought onto feed.
- **Separate the sick.** Separate out sick animals to avoid contact with uninfected animals. This will help stop the spread of the infection.
- **Biosecurity.** Always avoid mixing “new kids” with animals already on feed. Avoid carrying the disease to healthy animals via people, feed or bedding.