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Feeding Market Goats and Lambs for Show

One of the most important parts of raising a successful market goat or lamb project for the county fair is the feed program. Not every feed program will work for every animal. Just like people, every animal is different. When determining the type of feed program that is right for your animal, you need to take into consideration; the weight limits of your show, the animals age, and the animals frame size. Frame size is how big the animal has the potential to be when it is full grown. Some animals are small framed and their ideal weight might only be 70 lbs., while other animals have a much larger frame size and their ideal weight might be 120 lbs. or heavier. To determine an animals frame size, look at how long its neck is, how long its cannon bone is (the cannon bone is the bone between the animals knee and pastern), and its length of body. Frame size is important because it will help you to determine roughly how much your goat or lamb should weigh when it is finished and you take it to the final show of the year.

There are many good quality show feeds for goats and lambs on the market. When you are selecting what feed to use, pick one that is available in your area, affordable for you to buy and the one that you think will work the best for the goat or lamb you are raising. Ideally, you want to use a feed that has at least 16 percent protein and 3 percent fat. Most show feeds on the market today are what is referred to as a complete feed. This means that the feed should have all the vitamins, minerals, and nutrients the animal needs, including fiber. However, it is still recommended to feed a little bit of hay even when feeding a complete feed. Hay helps keep the rumen active and functioning correctly. This being said, only feed goats and lambs a very small amount of hay each day, just enough for the goat or lamb to have three or four good mouthfuls. If a goat or lamb is fed too much hay it will cause them to have a “hay belly”. Once a goat or lamb has a “hay belly” it is nearly impossible to get rid of and the goat or lamb will not be as competitive in the show ring. Goats and lambs finish from the inside out. Finish on a goat or lamb is measured over the loin and between the last two ribs. A goat or lamb that has been fed and managed properly will have the correct amount of finish while still being lean and well-muscled, not fat.

Along with evaluating the nutrient contents of a ration, you will also want to evaluate the mineral and vitamin levels in the feed to make sure they are adequate, and decide if you want to feed a medicated feed or not. Two important minerals to look at when feeding show wethers are the calcium and phosphorus levels. Feed rations should have a ratio of at least two parts calcium to one part phosphorus. If a feed rations calcium to phosphorus ratio is unbalanced, it can cause urinary calculi (kidney stones). Feeding a ration that has ammonium chloride mixed into it will help prevent goats and sheep developing urinary calculi. When selecting what feed ration to use, it is also important to consider using a feed that is medicated to prevent coccidiosis. Coccidiosis is a disease that affects the intestinal tract and is caused by the parasite coccidian. Young goats and lambs have the greatest risk of getting coccidiosis. A feed that is medicated to prevent coccidiosis will include one of the following medications, Rumensin, Bovatec, or Deccox depending on if the feed is labeled for goats or sheep.

Through the duration of your market goat or lamb project, you will want to weigh your animal regularly. Weighing your goat or lamb regularly will help you track its rate of gain, and adjust the amount of feed you are feeding to the weight of the animal. Goats and lambs should be fed at least 2-3% of their body weight a day. When increasing the amount of feed an animal is fed or introducing a new feed to the animal's diet, make gradual changes to allow the animal to adapt and decrease the likelihood of adverse effects, such as diarrhea or bloat, caused by sudden feed changes. It is important to have a regular schedule and feed your goat or lamb at the same time(s) each day. Ideally, show goats and lambs should be fed twice a day as close to 12 hours apart as possible. Feeding animals twice a day will help reduce feed waste, maximize the animals feed intake, and give you the opportunity to check on the animal to ensure it is healthy. Along with having a good feed program, it is also important to make sure the animal has access to clean, fresh water at all times.

In conclusion, determine your animals frame size to judge what a good finishing weight for your animal will be. Feed a good quality, complete feed, with a very small amount of hay, just enough for them to have three or four good mouthfuls, and feed your goat or lamb at least 2 percent of its body weight a day. You want your goat or lamb to be lean, not fat, and because of this it is very important to remember that goats and lambs finish from the inside out. Always keep in mind that your goat or lamb is similar to an athlete; they need to be trim, lean, and well-muscled, not fat and fleshy.

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