

Keeping Your Goat at High Noon

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The biggest factor that determines your goat's final placing in class is having the correct amount of bloom or condition. Often times in showmanship I ask exhibitors where fat is measured on the carcass. The most common response is "over the ribs." In actuality, fat on a goat is measured over the loin between the last pair of ribs. It is true that judges feel over the ribs to check for fat, however, this is not the location fat is measured on the carcass. Ideally, judges look for fat uniformity. In other words, we want the same amount of fat over the shoulder, ribs, top and rump. Unfortunately, this is difficult to achieve.

Goats fatten from the inside-out as opposed to other farm animals that fatten from front to rear and top to bottom. Additionally, the last fat to deposit on a steer's carcass is marbling (the fat inside the muscle), whereas goats, if they marble at all, tend to marble before depositing any significant external fat. Therefore, there is little to no value in having external fat on a goat other than having a minimal cover to maintain carcass freshness. With this in mind, you can see why fat goats (regardless of how correct, heavy muscled, deep bodied or well balanced) should find their way to the bottom of most classes. Unfortunately, today's show goats are often fed to excessively heavy weights and thus possess TOO MUCH external fat.

I often receive calls asking, "How do I trim/lean up or pull weight off my project goats?" Most fitters believe that you can pull condition by reducing the amount of feed that is being fed to the kid. WARNING! This is NOT a very effective way to pull condition off your goat. Limit feeding usually results in wash-topped, stale goats. Initially, let me recommend you go back and review my previous articles on nutrition. (Nutrition 101 parts one and two.)

Obviously, muscle shape is something that we can not afford to lose in showing market goats. Therefore, regardless of how you adjust your rations, the POUNDS of protein in your ration need to remain constant. More specifically, most people attempting to reduce fat levels on their kids will actually increase the percent protein in the rations (Atkin's diet theory). If a kid had been consuming 5 lbs. of a 15% ration the he has been eating 0.75 pounds of protein a day. If you cut his feed consumption in half and are feeding that kid 2.5 lbs. of feed a day, he is now consuming only 0.375 lbs. of protein a day. Depending on your kids weight, exercise levels and stage of maturity, he has little opportunity to maintain his present muscle mass. In order to maintain a consistent protein poundage intake, the percent protein in your kid's ration must now be doubled if you are going to but its feed consumption in half. Now I know you're thinking, "You are crazy! You can not feed that high protein without ruining a kid's stomach." Wrong. Once again the issue is not percent protein but pounds of protein consumed. If you actually studied the diet of goats consuming browse on the range (natural habitat), you would find that they consume a diet that is extremely high in protein from a percent protein standpoint. But they consume a rather small quantity of this diet from a dry matter intake standpoint and thus must have the higher percentage of protein to meet their nutritional needs due to this limited intake. Now that we have this theory understood, so not get the idea that you can pull body fat stores by maintaining feed intake and thus increasing the percent protein in the feed. This is where you can run into problems with over doing the protein effect and could mess up the stomach of your kid. Pushing the limit of protein on kids that are essentially on full feed would be in the

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neighborhood of exceeding a 20-21% protein level. I am not suggesting you can not feed higher levels than this to kids that are being full fed, but you are taking a big risk with keeping the kids on feed and not running into a problem with scours.

The other issue relative to the diet is energy or carbohydrate levels (Corn, oats, barley, etc.) One quick way to reduce fat deposits on the kids is to lower the level of these grains in the diet. By adjusting the use of these grains, feeders can manipulate of the amount of corn in the diet with either oats or barley. Although both these substitute feeds are still classified as energy feeds, they are also higher in fiber and tend to lay a firmer or leaner handling goat on the goat's carcass. Oats have a tremendous advantage as they tend to naturally keep the kids leaner while still providing adequate energy levels for growth. Again, be careful! You can pull too much energy from your ration and wind up with a leaner, but extremely stale goat.

Another issue is the actual fat level in the ration. Some commercial rations may contain as much as 8+% fat. Naturally, the lower the fat level in the feed, the less problem you will have with excessively fat goats.

Fiber levels in the feed is also something that needs to be considered. I am a firm believer that market goats must receive some fiber in their ration. A quality market goat must have some rib shape and body depth. Restricting forage intake on a goat is not a wise decision nutritionally. I am not suggesting turning your market goats loose on a round bale of hay, I am simply suggesting that some forage intake daily will help to keep your kid's rumen functioning normally and will likewise aid in limiting fat deposition due to increase fiber intake levels.

One of the most aggressive ways to remove external fat is through the use of "energy utilization enhancers." These products alter the Krebs's cycle (energy cycle) of the kid. These feed additives work by affecting the thyroid gland of the kid. As a result, thyroxin production is reduced and energy needs are greatly increased. If this increase in energy need is not met through the animal's ration, then it is fulfilled by pulling from the energy stores in the animal's body (fat deposits). I have seen patchy fat kids leaned down to show shape in as little as two weeks. A WORD OF CAUTION!! Extended use of these products can result in the removal of TOO MUCH fat and may cause more harm than good.

Another possible answer is the use of some form of an exercise program. Quite obviously, the more aggressive your exercise program, the more body fat you can remove. Be careful that you do not overwork your goats in an attempt to reduce fat levels. Overworking kids will often result in muscle breakdown and thus the loss of overall muscle mass.

In conclusion, you must keep you kids lean (and fresh) to be successful. We have had the most success in this area by maintaining feed intake with lowered fat/energy levels and then incorporating various energy burning products along with an aggressive exercise program. Do not be afraid to experiment a little, try various techniques and combinations. Just keep the kids fresh and you will always be competitive.