

# Sheep: general feeding guideline

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Feeding a flock of sheep, whether they number a few or in the thousands, is one of the most important factors of raising sheep. The biggest expense in sheep production is feed. I have outlined these guidelines for sheep but the majority of these can apply to goats as well and this is just a general guideline, I will write different articles at a later date that will go more in depth for different stages.



There is no one best ration for any purpose. You have to know your flock. You may have some that need more feed to just keep weight manageable and then you may have some that gain on just air!

Forage should provide the majority of nutrients for sheep and goats. Depending on the amount of grazing and quality of that grass available will dictate how much feed needs to be supplied.

If just introducing grain start by feeding  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. of grain per day and gradually increase level.

Always make sure you have enough feeder space. Overcrowding will get some fatter while the weaker less aggressive ones will become thinner.

Weigh your feed to know how much you are feeding and how much it is costing you. Nutrients for sheep are the same as any animal they need water, energy, protein, minerals and vitamins.

Basically feeding sheep consists of matching nutrients to whatever production phase they are in their major production phases are:

**Ewes** - Maintenance, Early Gestation, Late Gestation, Lactation, Breeding Season.

- Maintenance feeding - during the dry period, not pregnant or just pets the goal is to maintain body weight and condition.
- Late gestation - probably the most critical period for ewe nutrition. Ewes and does will gain weight during this phase of production. Seventy percent of fetal growth occurs during this period.
- Lactation - this is when ewes and does have their highest nutritional requirements, especially if they are nursing multiple offspring. Ideally, you should separate lactating females into production groups (singles vs. twins vs. triplets) and feed them according to the number of offspring they are nursing.
- Breeding - The body condition of a ewe affects the number of eggs she will ovulate.

### **Lambs** - Pre-weaning, Growing, Finishing.

Growing lambs have the highest protein requirements (percentage-wise) of any sheep or goat.

Protein level

Creep feed - 18-20 percent crude protein  
 40-70 lb. lambs - 16 percent crude protein  
 70 lbs. and up - 14 percent crude protein  
 Old crop lambs - 12 percent crude protein

Include Bovatec® or Deccox® in feed or mineral to prevent coccidiosis

### **Replacement Ewes**

Replacement ewes do not need to get too fat – they need just enough to keep growing but letting them get too fat could hinder their ability to breed later.

### **Rams** - Maintenance, Breeding Season.

A body condition score of 3.0 to 3.5 is good to start the breeding season. But do not allow males to get too fat during breeding season or off season. Some males will actually try to “starve” themselves during the breeding season, so be prepared to supplement them, if necessary with grain. Some breeders actually bring their rams in and feed individually during the day and only turn out to breed at night. Keep a close eye on your ram to see if feed needs to be reduced or increased.

Along with these guidelines a good program to control internal parasites needs to be followed. You can get with your local County Extension Agent or local vet to help you set up a program for de-worming.

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