



Reproduction management of a sheep and goat farming enterprise

Reproduction (production of progeny) is one of the most important factors which determine profitability when farming with sheep or goats

Rams

- Rams must be functionally effective: in other words they must have healthy reproductive organs and strong, healthy legs.
- Test rams for fertility. If only a few rams are used, it is especially important that they should be fertile.
- Rams must be skilled at mating.
- Use young rams with old ewes and old rams with young ewes.
- Rams must be healthy at breeding time. Some disease conditions such as fever (also bluetongue infections) could cause temporary infertility.
- The maximum age at which rams can be used for mating is 7 to 8 years. Old rams cannot follow ewes for long distances.
- Ensure that the rams are in a good condition at breeding time. They must not be overfat because then they become lazy.



agriculture

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- ❑ When animals have to walk long distances during the breeding season, rams must be bought in good time so that they can adapt to the environment.
- ❑ Do not release expensive, newly bought rams in areas where there are large numbers of poisonous plants.

Ewes

- ❑ Ewes must be functionally efficient. A healthy udder with two normal, healthy teats is essential. Examine the teats regularly in areas where ticks occur.
- ❑ Ewes with hard udders (as a result of inflammation or blue udder), and those with abnormally thick teats must be culled.
- ❑ Ewes must not be too old when they are mated. They must be culled after 5 to 6 lambing seasons (7 to 8 years). Their teeth become bad and they cannot walk long distances to find grazing.
- ❑ Ewes must neither be too fat nor too thin.
- ❑ If young ewes are too thin, they do not come into oestrus.
- ❑ Ewes must be healthy. Disease conditions such as fever immediately after mating could cause resorption of the foetus and abortion.
- ❑ Young ewes should be mated for the first time at 18 months.

Breeding season

- ❑ Mate the ewes so that they lamb when grazing is plentiful. Lambs will then have a better chance of survival. It also prevents the buying of expensive feed and the lambs are ready for the market at an early age.
- ❑ Limit the breeding season to 6 weeks to include two oestrus cycles. When the mating season is too long, flock management (dipping, vaccination and dosing) is more difficult.

Pregnancy period

- ❑ Avoid underfeeding and stress. Animals should not be driven for long distances during the first 3 weeks of pregnancy. This could cause resorption of the foetus.

- ❑ Provide sufficient feed to ewes during late pregnancy (last 6–8 weeks) to ensure that strong lambs are born, which have the prospects of a good life expectation.

Lambing time

- ❑ Lambs should suckle as soon after birth as possible to take in colostrum. Colostrum ensures that they build up natural immunity against diseases.
- ❑ Provide proper shelter against wind and rain.
- ❑ Ewes with lambs should not be allowed to become too thin, because the lambs will not get enough milk.
- ❑ When the ewe has a lot of milk, the lamb grows quickly and can be weaned sooner. This gives the ewe a chance to reach an acceptable mass before the start of the next breeding season.
- ❑ If a ewe loses too much condition during lambing time, she will not conceive easily during the breeding season.

**Contact the Animal Production Division of the
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