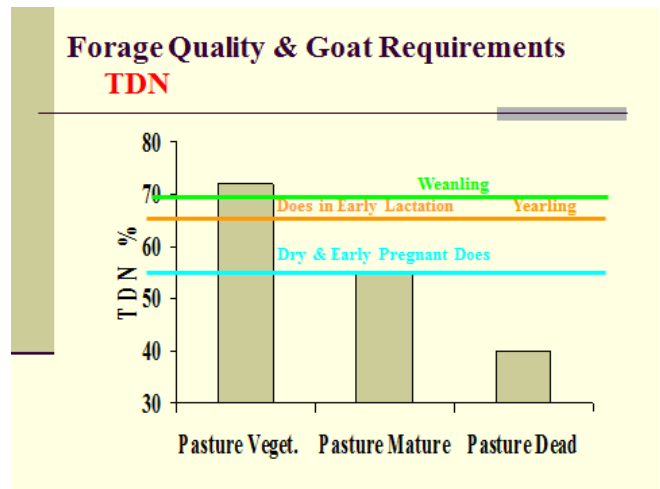
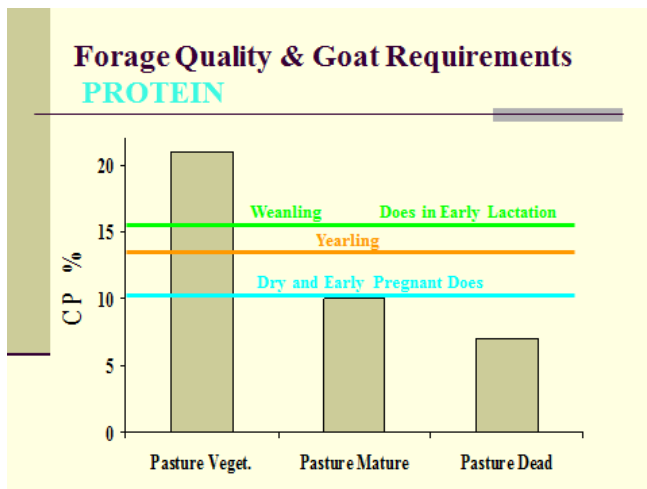


# Grazing Management for Goats

Good management and high production are essential for the maintenance of an efficient and profitable goat herd. Most herds in Georgia are used for supplemental income, however on some of these farms goats are a growing livestock enterprise. The majority of farms in Georgia are commercial operations. One of the greatest advantages of goats is that they can be raised under a wide variety of management systems and still be profitable. In order to profitable, producers must be effective and efficient in feeding their animals.

Feeding is the greatest cost of any goat operation. Whether raised for meat or dairy, goats need high quality feed in order to maximize production. Given adequate fertility, vegetative pasture which is forage with 20-32 days of growth, meets the nutritional requirements of all classes of goats on the farm. Mature pasture, which is forage with more than 32 days of growth, only meets the nutritional requirements of dry and early pregnant does. Does in early lactation, yearlings and weanlings will have to be supplemented if grazed on mature pasture. Graze goats with highest nutritional requirements on highest quality pasture available on the farm. Profitable goat production is pasture/browse based. Cost per lb of protein and energy (TDN) is lowest in predominately pasture/forage based systems. The graphs below (Greg Brann, USDA/NRCS) clearly indicate that goats with different protein and TDN requirements need to be grouped apart and fed according to nutritional requirements.



Because of their unique physiology goats do not perform like cattle or sheep. Therefore, profitable goat production can only be accomplished by optimizing the use of high quality forage and browse. In Georgia, this can be achieved by developing a year round system allowing the goats to graze throughout the year.

Browse and grasses constitute 60-90 percent of the diet of goats. Given the opportunity, goats are selective in what they eat so this means a higher quality diet. As natural browsers, goats prefer to graze above the shoulder. Being selective in nature, goats will choose brush, woody perennials and broad leaf plants. The following list shows grazing preference for goats:

**Most Desirable**

Multiflora rose  
Briars  
Ironweed  
Ragweed  
Lambsquarter  
Sericea lespedeza  
Honeysuckle  
Spiny amaranth  
pigweed  
Privet  
Kudzu  
Curly dock  
Winter annuals

**Less Desirable**

Tall fescue  
Bermuda Grass  
Crab Grass  
Orchard Grass

In addition to strategic deworming and the use of FAMACHA, proper grazing management helps control parasites. One of the best outcomes of a parasite control program is the reduction of the number of parasites that the goats are exposed to. This can be accomplished by managing pastures in a way that will reduce the parasite load. The following are ways this can be achieved:

1. Strive to keep grazing height 5" or higher.
2. Graze a contaminated pasture with another livestock species. The goat parasite larvae cannot survive in the gastrointestinal tract of another herbivore species such as cattle. This does not apply to sheep, which share worms with goats.
3. Use control grazing practices to optimize pasture production. This is a better practice than continuous grazing on the same pasture because goats will return to the same areas where their favorite plants are growing. Those areas will then become heavily infected by gastrointestinal parasite larvae.

Grazing management systems can be categorized into two broad areas, continuous grazing and controlled grazing. Continuous grazing allows a goat unrestricted access to a particular pasture throughout the majority of the grazing season. Continuous grazing allows the goat to decide where to graze, when to graze and plant selectivity is high. Controlled grazing involves the strategic movement of goats through multiple grazing paddocks based on the nutritional needs of the animals. During controlled grazing, attention must be given to the general well-being of the forages being grazed. Controlled grazing slows the dominance of less desirable, less nutritious plants because goats are forced to consume all plants before moving on. Continuous grazing requires few inputs, while controlled grazing requires a higher level of management and additional resources in the form of fence and water. Continuous grazing promotes improved

individual animal performance because the animals are allowed to select a large proportion of their diet. This selectivity reduces pasture utilization down to as low as 30% while controlled grazing balances individual animal performance. Controlled grazing increases pasture utilization to as much as 70%. This means higher productivity because more animals may be grazed per acre. Optimum forage utilization and quality is often sacrificed with continuous grazing, while the goal of controlled grazing is to increase forage production and utilization through the management of grazing animals. These grazing management practices can be utilized for co-mingled species such as goats and cattle.

In conclusion, feeding is the greatest cost of any goat operation. Grazing is less costly when compared to other supplemental feeding options. Grazing management is using basic plant and animal science principles to obtain the needed animal nutrition. It also focuses on the long term productivity and health of the pasture. Similarly, it is the use of grazing to supply the forage needed for the goats to achieve production goals without harming the plant or the environment. Goats are basically browsing animals, with preferred diets that are more similar to deer than cattle or sheep. However, most goat production involves grass based forage systems. Producers incorporate continuous and controlled grazing systems in order to meet the needs of their specific operations. Good goat producers are also good pasture/forage producers that utilize the animals as a means to harvest their crops.