

Reproduction Determines Profits

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As I give talks on meat goat health and productivity I find that most of us are in this industry because we enjoy working with our goats. Most of the folks I visit with, however, tell me that they would enjoy it a lot more if they were taking some profits to the bank. Many producers don't realize that although carcass quality and growth rate are important, it is reproduction performance that spells the difference between profit and loss. Today in Oklahoma, there is about a \$5/cwt difference in the sale price of a number 1 or number 2 kid. On a 60 lb. kid, this translates to about \$3.00 per goat. Obviously kids that reach market weight faster are more profitable. If however, my does wean twice as many kids, then the income is doubled, while the expense of maintaining the does is unchanged. This is important for commercial producers, but it is even more important for purebred breeders who are depreciating large investments for their breeding herd. The easiest and fastest way to increase profits is simply to have more kids to hop in the trailer when it is time to go!

The following are things you can do to insure optimum reproductive performance.

1. Make sure of your buck power. Have your bucks toughened up and ready to go when breeding season starts. Neither fat bucks nor thin bucks service does efficiently. Have your bucks fertility tested before each breeding season. Very few bucks are sterile, but a lot of them have marginal fertility. You need as many active sperm cells as possible to ensure a high percentage of twins and triplets. It takes several billion cells deposited in the female for 5 to 10 to reach the horns of the uterus where fertilization can occur. Know how many does your buck can service. Some mature show breed bucks can serve 25 to 30 does while most Kiko bucklings are fine with the same number and most mature Kikos can service 60 to 70 or more.
2. Time your breeding with nature. Does were intended to kid about the time of "green up" in the spring and they are most reproductively efficient 5 months before that time. Preliminary research by Oklahoma State University shows that significantly more kids per litter are born in March and April, and survival rate is also better at this time. Although breeding for fall kids or at the fringes of breeding season will work for some does, you will wean more kids (often twice as many) when you work with the natural seasons.
3. Have your does in good body condition at breeding. If a doe is too thin when bred, she can't eat enough to meet her maintenance requirements, pick up her condition, and maintain a pregnancy, especially with multiple fetuses. If she does manage to deliver 2 or 3 live kids, she may not have enough colostrum to insure their early immunity. Does that are fat at breeding do not ovulate well and are subject to pregnancy toxemia as the pregnancy advances. Does should be at a body condition score of about 2 ½ at breeding, on a scale of 1 to 4.
4. Cull your does. Get rid of the does that walk away from their kids, don't milk well, have bad udders, or consistently have single kids. Keep records and eliminate females that have longer intervals between kidding or low litter sizes

weaned. Many “first time” yearling kidders have singles, but after that it shouldn’t be tolerated. Look at the number of kids weaned, not the number birthed. Some does walk away from their kids and some will fight a bear for them. Which does will wean the most kids? Make sure that replacements come from the most reproductively efficient does in the herd. Quite often I hear the comment “I paid a lot of money for that doe, I can’t afford to cull her.” Perhaps you should be asking yourself, “how can I afford to keep her?” Will she make your situation better or worse a few years down the road?

It is important to have goals and work towards them, and reproductive performance is no different. A reachable goal for meat goats is a weaned litter size of 2.0 kids per doe bred, with each doe weaning off her body weight in kids every year. Very few producers are reaching this goal now, but you can’t be there tomorrow if you don’t start today. The producers who are working on reproductive efficiency are the ones who will still be selling goats in the future.

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