

# Creep Feeding Kid Goats

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Creep feeding is a means of providing supplemental feed for nursing kids. It is an essential component of an accelerated kidding and/or early weaning management program. Advantages of creep feeding include:

- It increases pre-weaning weight gain, especially for kids reared as a twin or triplet. In the competitive marketing environment for marketing show wethers, some degree of creep feeding is almost an essential.
- The conversion of creep feed to body weight gain is a very efficient process. Creep fed kids will have a greater weight per day of age.
- Kids will reach a target market weight and can be marketed at a younger age. For spring-born kids, avoiding the heat of the summer and large market runs may have a positive effect on net profit.
- Creep feeding reduces the stress associated with weaning. Potential breeding animals and show wether prospects make the transition from milk to a dry diet much smoother if creep fed prior to weaning.

Other factors to consider include:

- Kids that are creep fed seldom forget what a creep feeder is. If those kids are kept as breeding animals, they sometimes can be a challenge to keep out of a creep feeder.
- Producers must be conscious of cost of gain. Relatively inexpensive feed and a strong goat market equate to a positive return on the creep feed dollars invested. Feed conversions should be in the 5:1 or less range (1 lb gain per 5 lb feed consumed).
- Be aware of market conditions and weaning weights. In Texas, kids weighing in excess of 80 lb are discriminated (price) against by slaughter goat buyers.
- Creep feeding does not facilitate increased stocking rates. Providing creep to nursing kids has minimal effect on the nutrient requirements or forage intake of lactating does.

Kids begin to nibble at feed and hay very early. Personal experience indicates that some kids may have a functional rumen and be chewing their cud by two weeks of age. Therefore, if maximum growth is expected, creep should be available by the time kids are 3-5 weeks old. Creep consumption will be minimal until kids are 8-10 weeks of age.

**Feeder Design** The idea is to allow nursing kids access to feed while precluding access to does and older animals. Most creep feeders are constructed by placing a gravity flow, self-feeder in a pen or by building a pen around a feeder in the pasture. Either way, the challenge is to design a gate or entrance through which kids can pass, yet will deny entry by older goats. The schematic included herein is a simple design that works well. Spacing between the vertical bars needs to be 5", no more or less. The horizontal bar (A) is adjustable so the height of the opening through which kids pass (B) can be raised as kids get older. Total height of the gate (C) should be at least 48" or the same height as the creep feeding pen, whichever is taller.

The most durable and long lasting creep gates are constructed out of metal, preferably 1 or 1¼ inch square tubing and ½ or ¾ inch round rod or reinforcement steel. Gates constructed with lumber will suffice, but have a shorter life expectancy. Heavy welded wire panel (4 ga., 4" x 4" openings, 48" tall; usually sold in pieces 20' long) can also be used. Simply clip out the second, third and fourth (from the bottom) horizontal pieces between two adjacent vertical rods on the panel.

The fence or pen in which the creep feeder is located must be more durable than a typical pasture or field fence. Older goats will exert significant effort to gain access to creep feed. Polled or disbudded mature goats are more difficult to occlude than horned goats. Mature goats with horns are forever getting their head stuck during a failed attempt to enter a creep feeder.

Creep feeders should be located near water, shade or other places where goats loaf during the day. Kid goats enjoy climbing. Placing stumps, cable spools or large rocks in larger creep pens or near the creep feeder may provide an additional attraction.

**Management** The continuous presence of dry, fresh feed is important. Never let a creep feeder get completely empty. Clean out fine particles that accumulate in the troughs at least once per week. Allowing creep fed kids to go without feed for 24 hours then suddenly reintroducing feed can set the stage for enterotoxemia (overeating disease).

Feeders should be protected from moisture (rain, sleet or snow) and typically hold 100 - 1000 lb of feed. Wet feed will likely mold and should therefore be removed from a creep feeder immediately. Gravity flow self-feeders work very well. Use caution in the design of the trough wherein the feed is presented. Deep troughs or those with sloping bottoms can trap kids and result in suffocation.

Open troughs will suffice, but must be cleaned and filled frequently (at least once a day). However, kids will get in the troughs, urinate and defecate. The end result is wasted feed.

**Feed Grazing.** Creep feed does not necessarily have to be offered in a feeder or poured out of a sack. Creep grazing is a viable option for boosting weight gain by nursing kids. Creep grazing requires a high quality forage such as alfalfa, soybeans, peanuts, clovers, kudzu(?), immature sorghum sudan grass or millet. This list is certainly not all inclusive, especially for producers who live north or east of Texas. Forages offered in a creep grazing program must be high quality. Initially, it may be necessary to allow both does and kids to graze the creep forage, using the does to lead the kids into the creep grazed pasture.

**Dry Feed. The Great Debate -** Which one of the many products offered is best and most appropriate for my goats?

Hopefully, the list of minimum specifications included here will help you determine which feed is the best fit for your operation. Please understand, these are meant to be minimums.

**Minimum Specifications for a Meat Goat Creep Feed**

- fresh and palatable
- minimal dust/fine particles

- pelleted (<math>\lt; \frac{1}{4}</math> inch diameter)
- crude protein >14% (no urea)
- Ca:P ratio >2:1
- P content 0.38-0.45%
- urinary acidifier (0.5%)
- coccidiostat

The feed must be fresh and palatable to kid goats. If they won't eat it, the nutrient content is irrelevant. Select a feed that is readily available, kept in fresh inventory and is consistent from bag to bag. Dust and/or excessive fine particles in the feed will reduce intake, aggravate the upper respiratory tract and only result in wastage.

Pelleted feeds maintain the integrity of the ration and prevent goats from sorting ingredients. Goats are like children at a salad bar - they eat the desserts first and leave the lettuce, cole slaw, broccoli and cauliflower for someone else. Whole, rolled, flaked or cracked grains are dessert to a goat. Granular minerals and other fine particles in a ration will often be sorted out and left for disposal. This author prefers either a 3/16 or 5/32 inch pellet diameter.

Crude protein (CP) content should be a minimum of 14% and should be all natural (no urea). The urinary acidifier, either ammonium chloride or ammonium sulfate, will inherently contribute a minimal amount of non-protein nitrogen. Most commercially prepared goat creep feeds contain 15-18% crude protein. Certainly, there is little or no merit for creep feed CP levels above 18%.

A calcium (Ca) to phosphorus (P) ratio of at least 2:1, a P content less than 0.50% and the urinary acidifier are recommended in an effort to prevent urinary calculi, primarily in buck kids and wethers. Two urinary acidifiers are commonly used: ammonium chloride and ammonium sulfate. Both are salts. The sulfate form is less expensive. The chloride form seems to be the industry preference. If the feed is not pelleted, these ingredients will sift out and often be refused. Minimum recommended level of either acidifier is 0.50%. Levels of 0.75 to 1.0% have been fed to populations of goats known to be high risk for urinary calculi.

#### Precautions

Coccidiosis. Creep feeds should contain a coccidiostat for the prevention of coccidiosis. This malady is much easier prevented than cured. Two products are labeled for use in goat feeds: decoquinate (Deccox®) or monensin (Rumensin®). These are considered medications. If included, their presence must be documented on the label attached to each bag of commercially prepared feed. Either of these two products is required in very small amounts on a daily basis. Be aware that diluting the coccidiostat concentration in the kid's diet by adding corn or other feedstuffs to the creep feed will lessen the products efficacy.

Enterotoxemia (Overeating disease). Clostridial organisms (*Clostridium perfringens* type C & D) reside in the digestive system of goats. Under normal conditions, these potential pathogens do not cause harm. However, stress (environmental, physiological or psychological) can open the window of opportunity, the population explodes, releases a toxin that is usually

fatal to the host. Seldom does the herder get an opportunity to treat enterotoxemia and it typically strikes the largest, fastest growing most aggressive eaters.

Vaccines for its prevention are available and, if possible, should be given at 14-17 days before creep feed is provided. In very young kids, maternal antibodies may preclude development of immunity. Read and follow the label - most enterotoxemia vaccines suggest at least one booster 14-21 days after the initial vaccination. Vaccines are like life insurance - if you wait until they are needed, it is too late.

Economics. IF profitability is a concern, pay close attention to feed costs, weight gains and the market value of the additional weight gained. As previously mentioned, if a primary production goal is to produce high quality goats that will command a premium as show prospects or registered breeding stock, creep feeding or grazing is almost a necessity.

In general, as commercial slaughter goats get heavier, their market value decreases on a \$/lb basis. Commercial meat goat producers need to sharpen their pencil, calculate the net return without creep feed, feed, equipment and labor costs involved and compare it to the subsequent market value of heavier, creep fed kid goats.