

Housing and Facilities for Meat Goats

Shelter

Meat goats require minimum shelter in comparison to dairy goats. Goats will seek shelter from rain, preventing them from foraging. During warmer weather, rain may only cause mild discomfort, but in colder temperatures, goats in general should not remain cold and wet for long periods.

The goat ability to withstand adverse weather conditions is strongly related to body condition. Goats in good condition, that is goats that have a fat layer under the skin, can withstand rain and cold weather without much problem if they have access to good quality forage. For example, at the NC State goat farm, replacement does on a small grain grazing experiment have had no shelter since early March without any health problems. However, these animals were in very good body condition and had access to ample amounts of high quality forage. Young goats, on the other hand, are particularly vulnerable to respiratory infection and to hypothermia if they do not have access to shelter during rainy and cold weather. And it is not uncommon for a combination of cold wind and rain and the occasional snow and sleet to cause losses of young animals. Thus, the necessity for sheltering meat goats probably relates to the expected weather pattern in the area, the nutritional level and body condition of the herd, the physiological stage of the animals (newborn kids, dry does or does in early pregnancy, does in late pregnancy or lactating does) and the class of animals.

A sturdy shed, dry and open to the south side, can usually provide adequate protection. Rear eave heights of 4 to 6 feet and front eave heights of 6 to 8 feet are adequate. Eight to 10 square feet per goat is desirable for open housing. Other references suggest 5½ square feet per goat. Goats also like to be in or near a shed during the night hours. If the facility is part of the farmstead, so much the better because nearness to human activity plays a role in predator control. For feeding hay, grain or concentrate, 16 linear inches of feeder space is sufficient per doe, or 8 to 12 linear inches of feeder space if hay is self-fed. For young stock, recommendations are 12 linear inches of feeder space per animal, or 2 to 4 linear inches if hay or grain is self-fed. Troughs need to be easy to clean, should prevent goats from urinating or defecating on the feed, and be accessible from both sides.

Besides housing goats in a well-ventilated shed or barn, it is also important to regularly remove bedding soiled by manure and urine to minimize the formation of excessive amounts of ammonia. Ammonia can cause respiratory infections and pneumonia. As the concentration of ammonia is higher closer to the ground because of its density, young animals are especially affected by high concentrations of ammonia in a poorly ventilated barn or shed.

In the tropics or wetter climates, the type of goat shelter commonly found is one with an elevated, slatted floor. This design protects goats from rain, allows air movement and reduces accumulation of urine and feces, which in turn, favors sanitation.

Kidding Facilities

Kidding during cold months may require shelter for the does and kids to guarantee kid survival. Temporary kidding pens 4 feet x 5 feet have been used by goat producers with much success. The kidding pens should be located in an area free of cold wind. Does are placed in these jugs during kidding and for 3 to 5 days after kidding. This practice increases the bonding between the doe and the newborn, especially for the first-kidding does. In addition, it allows the producer to provide assistance if there are kidding complications. It also allows the producer to ensure that weak newborn kids get a sufficient amount of colostrum during the first 12 to 24 hours of life. After the kidding season, these pens can be taken apart and stored.

Working Facilities

A working facility will help operations like ear-tagging, vaccinations, medication (anthelmintics, etc.), counting, sorting, hoof trimming, etc.

A small pen with some means of herding the goats into it is usually sufficient for small operations. The pen should be sturdy, preferably solid-sided, and at least 5 to 6 feet tall. As goat numbers increase, the need for more elaborate working facilities arises. A basic working facility to handle larger numbers of goats is composed of a catch or crowding pen, a working chute, a “squeeze chute” or headgate, and a sorting (or cutting) arrangement of alleys, gates and pens to separate the goats. The crowding pen should be half as long as the working chute and up to 12 feet wide at the open end. The working chute should be about 10 feet long, 5 to 6 feet high, and 12 to 15 inches wide. Longer chutes tend to cause crowding and trampling at the forward end, and should be divided into sections with sliding gates. An adjustable chute will be advantageous to handle from small goats and kids to large bucks. Also, a series of canvas flaps suspended about halfway down into the chute keeps the goats’ heads down and eliminates riding. The sides of the chute should be smooth and solid. Ideally, for horned goats the chute should be tapered, with the top nearly twice the width of the bottom.

Goats should be handled quietly during working operations. Excess noise creates agitation, and may well cause goats to go over, under, or through whatever stands in the way, including the goats’ owner. Women generally are better than men in handling goats, and will perform the jobs at hand in a manner that creates less stress. Goats do not flow as smoothly as cattle, tending to rush toward an actual or expected opening. Goats readily drop to the ground under crowding pressure and are at greater risk from trampling and smothering.

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