



**Ontario Animal Health Network (OAHN)—Small Ruminant Network
 Producer Report for the period January 1st to March 31st, 2015 (1st quarter)**

The Ontario Animal Health Network is a program focusing on early disease detection so as to identify trends in animal health issues. Information was obtained from a quarterly survey of practicing veterinarians and laboratory data from the Animal Health Laboratory. It is the intent of this program to improve the health of small ruminants in Ontario.

TOP 3 DISEASES / ISSUES OF CONCERN* (Q1 2015) *RESULTS SIMILAR FOR SHEEP AND GOATS

Young stock (<1 year old):

- stillbirth
- chilling / starvation in newborns
- born weak

Adult stock (>1 year old):

- caseous lymphadenitis
- pregnancy toxemia
- mastitis

IMPACT OF COLD WEATHER, STAGE OF PRODUCTION & NUTRITION ON BODY CONDITION

One of the most important husbandry skills required by all livestock producers is the ability to recognize the body condition of their animals. Are they too skinny, too fat or do they have just the right amount of fat stores and muscling? Body condition significantly impacts animal health and productivity. Poor or excessive body condition can result in an increased incidence of metabolic diseases (e.g. pregnancy toxemia), as well as increased neonatal mortality. Maternal underfeeding impairs placental size, lamb/kid birth weights, brown fat stores in lambs/kids (a critical energy source prior to nursing), colostrum quantity and quality, and milk production. The ideal body weight of an animal will depend on its breed, frame size and nutritional requirements based on growth, stage of lactation and pregnancy.

Stage of Production, Nutritional Demand and Body Condition Score in Adult Sheep and Goats

Adapted from OMAFRA Fact Sheet “Nutrition of the Ewe Flock”

Stage	Description	Length (days)	Nutritional Demand	BCS
Maintenance	Dry period	0 - 180	Low	2.5 – 3.0
Flushing & Breeding	3 wks before to 3 wks after breeding	42 - 84	High	3.0 – 3.5 (males 4.0)
Early Gestation	Mostly placental growth	90	Moderate	2.5 – 3.0
Late Gestation	Fetal & udder growth	42	High	3.0 – 3.5
Early Lactation	Nursing lambs/kids	35 - 90	Very high	2.0 – 2.5 at weaning

The most critical times to condition score sheep and goats are pre-breeding, early gestation, late gestation and early lactation. It is important to score at these times and allow time to make the necessary changes if needed. One BCS is equal to 7 to 10 kg (15.5 to 22 pounds). It only takes two weeks to lose one BCS but it takes longer (6 to 8 weeks) to gain it back. To properly perform body condition scoring, animals should be palpated in the following locations: the backbone behind the ribs, the short ribs and the brisket in goats. At lambing and kidding, ewes and does need to be in

good body condition (score 3 to 3.5) to deal with the very high nutritional demands of early lactation and then have time to recover prior to breeding.

This year’s harsh winter was a challenge for producers in meeting the nutritional needs of their sheep and goats. Many of the top issues seen by veterinarians in the first quarter were likely related to the extreme cold weather and nutritional issues/deficiencies on-farm. In cold weather, the nutritional requirements of sheep and goats are increased by a minimum of 10 to 15%. Supplementing with grain is the common way to increase the calories in the adult diet, particularly in late gestation and early lactation. However, protein levels must be adequate as well – grain alone will not compensate for poor quality forage. It is important that feeds be analyzed for quality and diets balanced for energy, protein, fibre and mineral levels. Veterinarians in Q1 reported seeing animals eating adequate looking hay but when analyzed, protein levels were poor, thus accounting for their weight loss. Veterinarians and nutritionists speak of “3 livestock rations”: the paper ration, the ration fed to animals and the actual ration that an animal eats. The goal is for all three to be the same but often there are differences. Even if the diet is properly balanced, in cold weather sheep and goats may not eat enough to maintain their body weight.

Talk to your veterinarian or nutritionist for more information on ration analyses, cold weather feeding requirements and the impacts of nutrition on health and production.