It’s been a year since my last article regarding herd sires, their nutritional needs, and their longevity. With this month being the annual herd sire edition it felt proper that this month’s article revisit the subject of breeding sires and their longevity. This year I would like to focus primarily on maintaining our herd sires conditioning during the breeding season.

When a buck is breeding the primary focus of most breeders is upon the does getting bred. This is not totally out of line as the success of the breeding season will be measured in the number of does who will conceive and raise kids. Unfortunately with such a focus on the does, bucks often get overlooked beyond an initial soundness exam prior to their introduction into a group of does. This oversight creates the opportunity for a buck to expend too much energy, lose too much weight, and have a negative impact on the overall conception rate. With this in mind we must ask; can weight loss/gain of a buck during breeding be a detriment and if so how can we reduce its impact?

Can weight-loss/gain be a detriment? The short answer is absolutely! The long answer however may be a bit more complicated. There is a reason many bucks die young but conditioning extremes are on the short list of the primary causes. Weight loss and weight gain are both normal parts in the productive life of any herd sire. As many may know however, too much weight gain (a.k.a. obesity) can negatively impact fertility, libido, and put a tremendous stress on the cardiovascular system. Too much weight loss can also negatively affect fertility and make a goat more susceptible to disease. Obviously, this creates a dilemma as an extreme in either direction can create the same issues. With this in mind; what is the ideal weight of a buck as a whole?

As with the does we must use body condition scoring (BCS) to evaluate the conditioning and weight of our breeding bucks. I personally like to use a scale of 1 to 5 where one is an animal that is skeletal and five is a marshmallow with legs. Ideally a buck prior to breeding would sit around a 3.5. At this conditioning a buck will have sufficient weight to be healthy and theoretically fertile, as well as allow for some weight loss during breeding. It is important to note this could be considered too conditioned for a buck that is not in use or likely to be used soon. If a buck is not in use, or preparing for eminent use maintaining a BCS of a 3.0 would be better. Once a buck is introduced into the herd for breeding, we should expect a level of weight loss. In this nutritionist opinion however we should never let a buck fall below a 2.0 on the 1 to 5 BCS scale. Any time a bucks conditioning falls below a two, one can expect a buck to struggle during weather changes, have reduced viable semen count, and be at an increased risk of death or illness.

How can we reduce the impacts of weight loss/gain? Simply put; be careful with the feed scoop. Every producer should be mindful that they are not over or under supplementing an animal. In general we should expect to supplement more grain to bucks if they start to lose weight. Many bucks while breeding will have a reduced appetite though and it will become necessary to offer a more concentrated grain supplement (higher protein and fat) to maintain their weight or reduce the rate of loss. This may vary buck to buck as some will be easier to keep weight on based on their age and genetics. Regardless, supplementation during breeding should be managed carefully to maximize the productive potential of any herd sire.

It has been said that a buck is 50% of the herd. Managing a herd sire’s condition may make the difference between living and breeding for years to come or having an early death. When we successfully manage weight loss/gain properly we can enjoy the benefits of another successful breeding season.