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## Goat production: the role of liveweight scales

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Andy Kajons District Livestock Officer  
(Sheep & Wool), Division of Animal Production  
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Liveweight scales allow easy and accurate measurement of the body weights of goats. Liveweights can be used to:

- estimate carcase characteristics for goat meat marketing
- select faster growing goats
- monitor general flock progress and performance
- determine dose rates for drenches and some dips
- estimate feed requirements accurately for drought and lot feeding.

### GOAT MEAT MARKETING

Markets for goat meat are usually reported in carcase terms. An accurate measure of liveweight helps the producer interpret market information, gauge the growth of goats and time sales.

Given an accurate liveweight obtained by using scales, the goat producer can multiply by the dressing percentage to obtain a reliable estimate of carcase weight.

### SELECTING FASTER GROWING GOATS

The goat industry uses many selection indexes that include a body weight component. An accurate measure of liveweight when used to calculate growth rates will help you select faster growing goats.

*The only way to measure liveweight accurately is to use scales. Estimating weight by eye is very inaccurate.*

### MONITORING FLOCK PROGRESS

Liveweight provides a good guide to goat performance.

The progress of the flock can be monitored by weighing regularly or at critical stages. Weights of the whole flock can be taken, or, more realistically, on a random sample (usually 10% of large flocks). For regular weighings a random sample should be identified so that the same goats are weighed each time.

**A cage with clock face type of scale can be easily transported.**





**Computer-operated scales provide digital readout and options for automatic drafting, colour branding and recording of data for later use.**

Doe liveweights at joining are of critical importance, as higher body weights lead to better ovulation and conception rates. Producers can set a target weight for does at mating and use scales to check on their progress towards the target.

Does properly fed and in good body condition will have less kidding difficulty, more milk and better kid survival.

## **DOSE RATES FOR STOCK MEDICINES**

Many of the dose rates of modern drenches and pour-on dips are geared to body weights. Scales can be used to:

- ensure you are giving the correct dose
- draft goats into weight groups to make more efficient use of chemicals.

## **DROUGHT FEEDING AND LOT FEEDING**

There is little detailed knowledge of goats' nutritional requirements either in lot feeding, drought feeding or supplementary feeding. Liveweight scales will be important in the maintenance of any management systems developed for lot feeding or for feeding during a drought.

## **TYPES OF SCALES**

There are several types of scales on the market.

**Cage with clock face scale.** These are normally used with an existing race and are manually operated. They can be easily transported in a trailer or utility.

**Cage mounted on load cells.** These are normally used with an existing race and have a digital weight readout. They can be easily transported in a trailer or utility, and some collapsible models can fit into the boot of a car.

**Computer-operated scales.** These consist of a cage mounted on load cells and have automatic drafting features (the animals are automatically drafted in several ways according to pre-set weight ranges). They are designed to work at the end of an existing race in a semi-permanent position. They have a digital readout, and may have options for recording data for later use and automatic colour branding of stock. They may be transported in a trailer or utility, but loading, unloading and setting up can be time consuming.

**Suspension weigher.** With this type of scale the sheep or goats are lifted off the ground suspended from a clock face scale. This low cost weighing device can be used in a variety of situations, but is not suited to weighing large numbers of animals.

Edited by Cheryl Grgurinovic  
Division of Agricultural Services

### **DISCLAIMER**

The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of review (October 2003.) However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Agriculture or the user's independent adviser.