

Feeding during lactation

Take home messages

- Feeding the fawns and hinds well prior to weaning will increase weaner weights and hind reproduction performance
- There is a need to balance quality and quantity of feed
- Many options are available and farmers should work with their local seed and fert reps and local farmers to come up with the options that best suit their overall farming system and environment.

Many farmers in Advance Parties are finding improved hind and fawn performance by better feeding during lactation. This is evidenced by heavier weaning weights and hinds getting back into fawn earlier. In some cases, it may allow farmers to move from a pre rut weaning to a post rut weaning system.

Lactation is a physiological process that is driven by the fawns demand for milk and the hind's ability to produce milk. Trials have found that the demand from the fawn is the biggest influence on milk production and that hinds will respond to the amount of milk drawn by increasing or decreasing their production. If the hind is not adequately fed, she will lose weight to produce milk. If the hind is severely malnourished, it is likely that milk production will not respond to the demand from the fawn.

Fawns start to eat pasture soon after birth and this feed gradually takes over the milk component of the diet up until weaning. When thinking about feeding lactating hinds, it may help the look at it from the point of view of feeding the fawn. The fawn will be more selective in the feed it consumes and will take a long time to adapt to dietary changes. The better the feed available and the more the pastures suit the taste preferences of the young deer, the more they will consume and the more quickly they will adapt from a milk fed animal to a ruminant. Research has found that the forages that young deer prefer best are low oestrogen red clover, chicory, lotus and other clovers and legumes. Perennial ryegrass is a low preference, although new, young grasses and annual ryegrass may be preferred to established grass based pastures.

Feeding during lactation should focus on feeding the fawns and getting them off to the best start possible towards rumen development. The hinds, if offered the same diet will also benefit inadvertently. This will result in heavier weaner weights, which are correlated with spring weights and will reduce the post weaning stress and growth check.

Rising two and three year old hinds may benefit from being run separately with better feed as they are still growing, take longer to adapt and tend to naturally get in fawn later so any nutritional effects on conception date will be more important in these younger hinds.

Late fawning hinds can also be run separately if the management system allows this. These hinds should be set stocked on better feed to encourage earlier fawning and fed better through lactation so that the fawns are not too small at weaning.

Hinds can be conditioned during pregnancy. While over-fatness is sighted as a cause for dystocia, it is uncommon on most farms. Hinds will milk off their backs, however using this approach does not look after the fawn very well and puts the hind into a cycle of weight loss and weight gain which is relatively inefficient.

Maintaining pasture quality

Balancing pasture quality and quantity during lactation can be a challenge, especially when set stocked on hill blocks and low stocking density.

Use cattle either in rotation or co-grazing with fawning hinds

Can usually add and remove cattle without disturbing hinds too much

Other forms of pasture control - topping, chemical topping

Increase stocking rate and feed supplements

Start rotations as early as possible.

Use late flowering pasture species if suitable.

Options and comments on feeding during lactation

Spitfire rape

- More space
 - 5kg heavier
 - Earlier in fawn
 - Preparation of fawns for post weaning diet
 - Low in protein so need to add lucerne baleage.
 - Late lactation. If using in late lactation good to wean back onto similar feed. Weaners went back onto grass + rape + lucerne after weaning. Hinds onto rape and grass
 - Fence training - high speed pulse most important
 - Management and regrowth: Used for 70 days strip grazing post weaning. Hinds can free range.
 - Nitrogen to boost regrowth
 - Can co-plant with legumes or stitch in an annual grass, clover or herb that is to be treated as a crop.
 - Summer crop can be grazed through to March and then set up for Italian ryegrass.
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Plantain/Clover

- late January start
 - better weight in first fawners
 - First fawners have longer adjustment period
 - Use cattle to maintain feed quality
 - Can fill several feed requirements: Stags during velvet growth, hinds and fawns during summer and autumn. Change the priority feeding group for different times of the year
 - Maintains feed quality longer into summer
 - Better able to withstand moisture deficit
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Young grass + lucerne

- 6kg heavier at weaning
 - Add grain to help with ME
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Advantage feeders

- Wheels and different size feeder (1T versus 2T), good suspension
- Barley after new year
- OK in the wind
- Earlier weaning (Feb) and settled weaners
- 300/feeder max (barley)
- If using PK animals self-select 250-400g/day

- Both hinds and weaners were quick to adjust
 - May decrease Johne's disease risk by eating uncontaminated feed.
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Lucerne baleage in racks

Made properly - too dry hinds don't like it
After finished fawning

Barely

Trickle feed, ready for weaning
From late Jan/early Feb and continue after weaning
Quieten weaner deer + small nutritional benefit

Palm Kernel

After weaning
Ad lib
Feed in bins
2nd fawners important
May be a problem for export

Supreme mix

Deer nuts
Weaners

Chicory

Increased feed value and palatability
6-7kg in grass mix
Rotational grazing with short rotation interval
Persisting 5 years
Legumes in the mix

Fescue and Clover

More settled and earlier

Other tools

Set stocking

Know the mean fawning date and start and finish
Early rotation
Hinds in great condition at set stocking to increase milk production
High country - BCS=4
Keep low BCS hinds back
Cattle to keep quality of tussock
Barley

Body Condition Scoring

At set stocking 3 or less = feed separately and better
Late Jan/Feb - decide to feed supplements or wean early