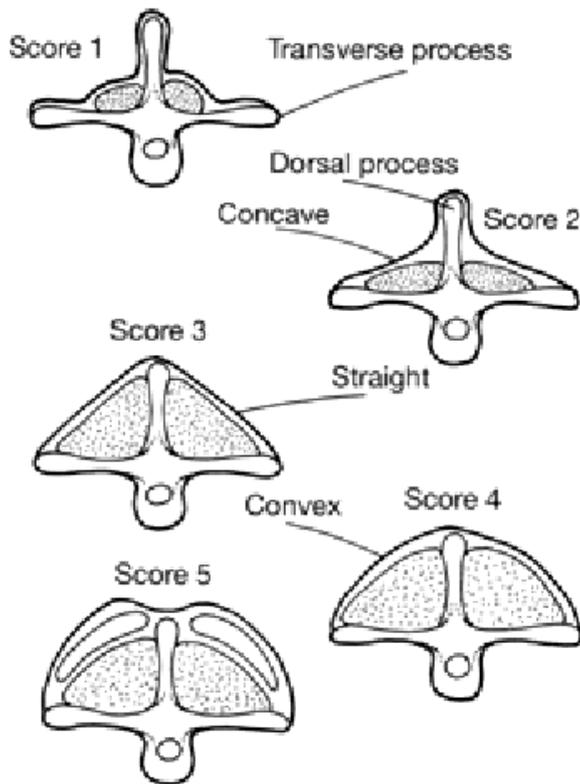




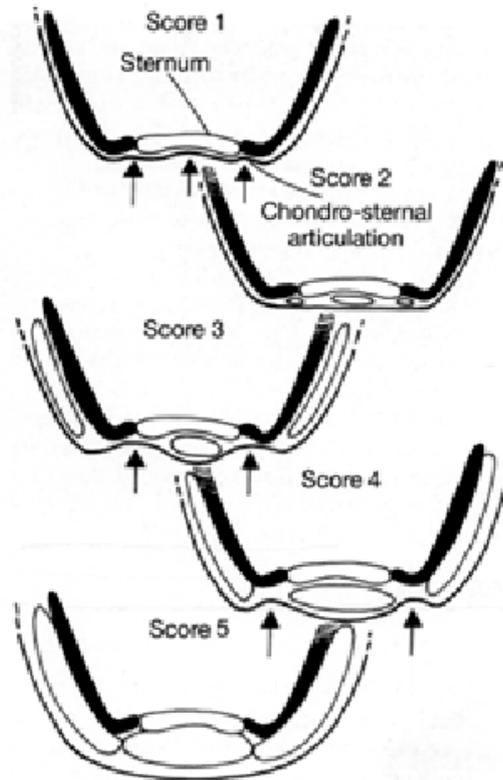
## Drought Conditions Hits the Hunter Hard!

### Do you know how to Body Condition Score Goats?

Goats initially lay their fat down internally, so when assessing body condition score it is important to score the lumbar area and also the sternum. The goats Body Condition Score (BCS) is a rating of 1-5, you rate both areas (lumbar and sternum) and take the average of both. It is good to regularly check the BCS of your goats especially during these challenging times.



Goat condition scoring – lumbar.



Goat condition scoring – sternal.

### There are a number of objectives throughout drought times

- 1) Maintain the live weight of goats
- 2) To meet the requirements of breeding does
- 3) Maintain the welfare of goats
- 4) Allow kids to grow to a target weight without suffering any permanent setbacks

When any of these objectives cannot be achieved then it is time to make difficult decisions on either increasing supplementary feed, agisting stock or culling your numbers of livestock. The higher the stocking rate the greater the effects of the drought will be on your property.

### **How do you know when it is time to start drought feeding?**

Drought feeding needs to commence when 50% of the goats in your flock have fallen to a BCS of 2, or when the goat is 3kg above their critical weight.

#### **The critical weight is:**

- 30% less than their recent peak weight + 1kg for each year of age and add the estimated fleece weight (if applicable)
- If you don't have scales you can use a heart girth tape for a reasonable estimation of weight and/or look up breed standards.

Start the drought feeding when your goats are 3kg above the critical live weight or earlier. Feeding inexperienced goats is best to start with good quality hay and when they are used to feeding hay you can slowly start to introduce grain. If you are using grains then it needs to be introduced slowly otherwise they will gorge themselves and create ruminal acidosis and potentially death. If grain feeding, start with 50g grain/head every second day for adults and 25g/head for weaners plus good quality hay. Watch out for shy feeders as they may not be getting their daily requirements and need to be separated from the rest of the herd. Ensure there is enough room per head at the trough otherwise some goats will miss out on their share of the feed too and some goats will be getting too much. If goats are on a high grain diet then the males are prone to uroliths, also known as bladder stones which can cause urinary obstruction, consequently ammonium chloride may need to be added to the diet.

It is important to work out the daily requirements for maintenance for your goats in stable dry conditions with minimal activity. There will be additional requirements for growth, pregnancy and lactation. Throughout a pregnancy the energy and protein requirements of the doe will increase due to 70% of foetal development occurring in the last 6 weeks of pregnancy. At day 110 of pregnancy the goat requires twice her maintenance requirements, and >day 140 of pregnancy and early lactation the doe requires 2.5 times maintenance.

If your goats are still grazing pasture as well as supplementary feed then they will be using energy moving around the paddock and their energy requirements should be at least 25% greater than that calculated for maintenance and no grazing. If the topography of the land is hilly then it would be a good idea to confine the goats to a smaller flatter section of the property so they are not using up too much energy searching for feed.

If the weather conditions are cold, wet and windy then their energy requirement will double. The weather conditions that are critical include;

- >5mm rain
- Temp<10C in wet weather
- Temp<3C in dry weather
- Winds stronger than 10 knots

Cold stress will be exacerbated if the goat has been recently shorn when cold weather and drought conditions occur (Angora and Cashmere goats).

### **Is Supplementary Feeding Sustainable?**

It is important to determine the cost of feeding over what could be a long drought. Is the cost realistic to your circumstances? Is it better to decrease your numbers before the costs get too high? Which goats are the best animals to cull? Do you have any surplus stock? These might be the best to cull initially.

Surplus stock may include:

- Non-breeding goats such as wethers
- Does with no kids, poor teeth, udder faults, feet faults
- Shy feeders
- Saleable goats
- Cross-bred goats

Many producers aim to keep their core breeding stock so they can recover after the drought breaks.

All supplementary feed should be analysed for quality. You want to feed the required amount of energy that the animals need at the lowest cost. Goats do require fibre in their diet especially during late pregnancy and early lactation and ideally it should be 30% of their diet (less if pasture is still available).

**Water quantity and quality is also essential!**

An adult goat on average will drink 4L/head/day but during hot weather or increased exercise they can drink up to 9L/head/day.



The NSW Government has made drought assistance available for producers to help manage the effects of drought. If you feel that you need assistance then please don't hesitate to call one of our LLS Offices and we can point you in the right direction.

Any enquiries on drought, drought feeding your goats or any other condition please contact me on Ph: 02 49328866 or email: [kylie.greentree@lls.nsw.gov.au](mailto:kylie.greentree@lls.nsw.gov.au)

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