WHEN SHOULD I BREED MY DOELINGS?

by Dr. Beth Johnson

Through the years one of the most asked questions is, "When can I breed my "junior" does or 'doelings'?" These are classified as does which have never been bred and are usually 8-18 months of age. My most common answer based on the current literature has been when they are 70% of their mature body weight. Although this may be the correct answer, what if you don't know what their mature weight will be? Here are some recommended mature body weights from a few breed associations.

- Dairy Goats: 120-150lb
- Boer Meat goats: 130-170lb
- Kiko Meat Goats: 110-140lb
- Savannah Meat Goats: 110-150lb
- Spanish Meat Goats: 90-130lb
- Pygmy Goats: wither height 16-22inches, app. 85lb
- Nigerian Dwarf: wither height 17-21inches, app. 75lb
- Angora: 70-110lb

As one can see, each breed has quite a range of mature body weights. And, due to genetic variation, there is a range of mature body weight within each breed as well. Therefore, you should know the sire and dam, and the nutritional status of the doeling prior to determining the best time to breed.

A more thorough approach is to take the topics below into consideration:

What is her body condition score: 2-3/5 is desirable. Here is an excellent website for learning how to assess your animals body condition score:
http://extension.psu.edu/courses/meat-goat/reproduction/body-condition-scoring/body-condition-scoring-table

Type of buck she is being bred to: If you are using a herdsire which is quite a bit larger than your doelings (in an effort to improve genetics) then, you may want your doelings to be closer to their mature weight. Or, if you have knowledge about the birth weights of kids from the buck you will be using from previous kidding seasons or lineage, you should select a buck with smaller offspring birthweights.

Age: Doelings should not be bred prior to 8 months of age. Even though they may reach sexual maturity at 6-7 months, this does not mean they should be bred at this time.

Nutritional status of the doe during gestation: Is the nutrition available to her during gestation adequate enough to provide nutrition for pregnancy and continued growth? This is often assessed through body condition scoring.

Nutritional Requirements of Small Ruminants

Nutrient Requirements of Replacement Ewe Lambs/Doe Kids

Weight	ADG	Lbs of DM/day	Lbs of TDN/day	TDN % of DM/day	Lbs of CP/day	CP % of DM/day	g of Ca/day	g of P/day
66 lbs	0.50	2.90	1.70	65.40	0.41	15.80	6.40	2.60
88 lbs	0.45	3.40	2.00	64.50	0.39	12.60	5.90	2.60
110 lbs	0.26	3.70	1.90	57.60	0.30	9.10	4.80	2.40
132 lbs	0.22	3.70	1.90	57.60	0.30	9.10	4.50	2.50
154 lbs	0.22	3.70	1.90	57.60	0.29	8.80	4.60	2.80

Nutrient Requirements of Ewe Lambs and Doe Kids - First 6-8 weeks lacation suckling twins

Weight	ADG	Lbs of DM/day	Lbs of TDN/day	TDN % of DM/day	Lbs of CP/day	CP % of DM/day	g of Ca/day	g of P/day
88 lbs	-0.22	4.60	3.20	69.60	0.67	14.60	8.40	5.60
110 lbs	-0.22	5.10	3.50	68.60	0.71	13.90	8.70	6.00
132 lbs	-0.22	5.50	3.80	69.10	0.74	13.50	9.00	6.40
154 lbs	-0.22	6.00	4.10	68.30	0.77	12.80	9.30	6.90

*Ewes lambing at a year of age are generally not able to eat as much as mature ewes and are expected to lose weight more rapidly.

Nutrient Requirements of Ewe Lambs and Doe Kids - Last 4 weeks gestation (130-175% birth rate expected)

Weight	ADG	Lbs of DM/day	Lbs of TDN/day	TDN % of DM/day	Lbs of CP/day	CP % of DM/day	g of Ca/day	g of P/day
88 lbs	0.50	3.30	2.20	66.70	0.44	13.30	7.40	3.50
110 lbs	0.50	3.50	2.30	65.70	0.45	12.90	7.80	3.90
132 lbs	0.50	3.70	2.50	67.60	0.46	12.40	8.10	4.30
154 lbs	0.47	4.00	2.50	62.50	0.46	11.50	8.20	4.70

Charts courtesy of the Small Ruminant Profit School

Will the doeling have adequate nutrition available after she kids to provide for lactation and continued growth? If she has multiple kids such as triplets, will she have adequate milk for all three or even two? If you decide to breed your does before one year of age, they will probably need plenty of adequate digestible nutrition in order to raise their kids. Due to their age, it is likely they will not have enough body capacity or maturity to consume enough feed to provide nutrition for milk production and growth if they kid at a year of age. Some producers do not want to wait until does are 2 years of age to have their first set of kids. Therefore, these young does will need to be managed in a manner where they are fed separately because they tend to be more timid in a group setting and they need more nutrients than a grown doe with kids. If this is in your herd plan, then make appropriate steps to provide nutrition for these does to prevent them from becoming stunted and never reaching their genetic potential.

On another note, it has been shown that there are more dystocia problems in doelings that are bred to kid at 12-14 months of age. This is because they are bred before they reach 70% of their mature body weight and their pelvic area is too small to deliver the kids. It's amazing what an extra 6 months can provide in terms of maturity and ease of kidding. On the other hand, a drawback to kidding at 24 months is the doe tends to become obese as she reaches 18-20 months of age and pregnancy toxemia becomes an issue in late gestation in these older does. If you decide to wait until the doe is older, be sure to monitor her body condition and breed when they are 2.5-3/5 body condition score.

Regardless of when you plan to breed your doeling, be sure to trim her feet, treat for parasites, both internal and external, vaccinate (especially if abortion has been a problem in the past) and provide essential vitamins and minerals to ensure the best reproductive rate possible before she is bred.

Dr. Beth Johnson *is a Staff Veterinarian in the Kentucky Department of Agriculture and has 40 years of experience raising and treating small ruminants. Her family farms in Parksville, KY where she raises Gelbvieh cattle and Boer goats.*