



## CASE STUDY 1: Complete pellet feeds at Bushwalker Farm Ltd.

Often, the amount of feed needed to meet a herd's daily nutrient requirements is much more than on-farm crop production can provide. That's the main reason Dirk (and his wife, Tracie) Boogerds of Bushwalker Farm in Embro, Ontario chose the complete pellet feeding program.

With a milking herd of approximately 550 does, the Boogerds appreciate the consistently high production throughout the year, reduced labour, and relatively little capital investment the program requires.

The complete feed pellets are formulated to meet the animal's nutrient requirements and are fed ad libitum (or 'free choice'), which means the doe is able to regulate her own intake. Dirk's herd averages 0.8 kg of feed per litre of milk produced, which takes into consideration a small amount of waste. Dirk also chooses to feed free choice straw; although it adds no nutritional value, it provides the does with effective fiber needed for rumen health and function.



During milkings, Dirk will fill the parlour with the group and attach the milking units. He then fills a feed cart and evenly distributes feed to the group in the parlour and holding pen area. When that group is returned to the pen, there is little competition or crowding at one end of the manger because the feed is already spread. This process is repeated for every group during each milking plus a top-up feeding around noon. The total time spent feeding is usually 30 minutes per day, and at the maximum, it could take one hour.

Dirk compared the labour required for complete feed to the component feeding program that he used to use. It may be a similar amount of time spent feeding for total mixed rations (TMR) or partial mixed rations (PMR), but the difference in labour is really made if you consider preparation of TMR and PMR inputs, from the field work to the mixer.

"When you're out in the field, you're not in the barn," Dirk states simply. On his farm, Dirk cash crops all of the land, so he doesn't own any equipment and is able to generate additional income alongside the goats. "If I had the equipment and land, maybe I would have chosen a different system. But to buy all of that, or contract it out, would be really costly when there is an alternative solution. And I have more time to manage my herd, instead of sitting on a tractor."

Not only does the milk flow consistently. Bushwalker Farm also enjoys above average components, which Dirk attributes to the feed. “Maybe complete pellets cost more on paper but the milk is valued higher, so I think it evens out,” explains Dirk. He also notices his does come to their milk faster and regain a good body condition after kidding.

When his herd was just starting up, Dirk enjoyed the low capital investment that was associated with this feeding program. He did not need a mixer or a distribution cart (until later); at that time, Dirk was able to feed the goats with a wheelbarrow and pail. The farm had existing grain bins, on which Dirk installed new flex augers and was ready to start feeding.

Complete feed is great for producers with a small land base, but it can also benefit those with on-farm cash crop production. Producers can use the crop production for secondary income or bank their crops to reduce future feed costs.

For producers considering this program, Dirk cautions that it takes time for the goats to get used to the feed. Feeding pellets to a large group can cause gorging in the beginning; which can cause scours and some nutritional ailments, as well as increased feed costs. “After a month or two, the goats will level out,” assures Dirk.

He also suggests producers new to this program should be strict with body condition scoring. “Older does will not be as efficient [in turning feed into milk], and sometimes start gaining condition,” says Dirk. “For these groups, I limit their feed intake and offer free choice hay and straw to control the weight gain.”

The complete pellet program is started pre-weaning with free choice pellets (Dirk uses a 20 per cent protein starter pellet), before switching to a 17 per cent doeling ration started shortly after weaning. Once the doeling is ready to breed, Dirk switches their feed to a 15 per cent protein pellet, at up to one kilogram per day with free choice hay. At kidding and for the first 200 to 260 days of lactation, the does are fed a Top Milker formulation.

To learn more regarding this feeding program, discuss this option with your herd nutritionist or feed expert.

This case study is part of a series detailing different feed options in Ontario’s goat industry.

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