

Efficient strategies to help small ruminants maintaining their body conditions during drought.

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**Drought is a slow process and it progresses over time.** It may not always be possible to prevent drought recovery time.

For the past years, Africa has been experiencing ongoing dry conditions with limited amount of feed and water. During this period, it is vital to prepare animals for strategies that will help them maintain their body conditions (production) and be productive.

**The reduced livestock metabolism enables the animals to survive longer especially during these current climatic conditions.** It is important to start feeding animals before they reach their critical live weight.

## **Strategies to be considered:**

1. **Selling:** selling the livestock **is the first and best solution**, when doing this one should target the ones that are not productive or too old. This is the **ideal solution to reduce the waste or cost of feed, that is why it is important to focus more on the productive livestock and young kids.** It makes no sense in putting more effort into unproductive goats when they are not bringing out anything. Sell dams with persistent/chronic lameness and mastitis and those that frequently present episodes of worm burden that require treatment. Selling enables you to pay more attention to animals that are productive because the animals are also reduced.
2. **Culling:** it could be another option. Of course, this would not be the best option to most farmers. **Livestock that should be targeted are those that are unsaleable and unhealthy.**

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3. **Early weaning/Pre-weaning** can be done as soon as the rumen is fully developed, since it takes about a couple of weeks for it to be fully developed. When kids/lambs are weaned early, cautious and specific care should be followed. At this stage, kids and lambs should be introduced to creep feeding and to ensure that the animals are not exposed to diseases/conditions, the feed should be medicated or vaccinated. **Early weaning will not increase returns, but it prevents long term pressure on the animal and pasture.** It helps ewes/does to regain their body condition faster and especially during the next breeding season resulting into higher conception rates and reduced mortalities.

## **Group of livestock according to their physiological status**

**Grouping animals ensures that animals are not overfed or underfed.** Younger kids should also be considered as a high priority, because they need more feed for growth. Does and Ewes can also be grouped based on their physiological status and body condition score. All the pregnant, lactating ewes/does and goats and sheep having 2.5 or lower body condition should receive more nutritional.

***Drought always presents difficult management strategies, but it is however important to make careful decisions during these times to avoid future losses.***

### **References**

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[pdf](#)

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