



## How to Read a Feed Label – Part 1

By Jackie Nix

At one time or another, every goat producer will be faced with reading and understanding a feed label. Being able to use the information provided on feed labels will help you make more accurate management decisions and avoid costly and/or dangerous feeding mishaps. This two-part article will focus on what is included on a feed label and how to interpret and use the information in your day-to-day decisions on your farm.

In the United States, rules and regulations concerning the sale of commercial livestock feeds and feed supplements vary from state to state. The content of feed labels are regulated by each individual state. Because most state regulators belong to the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO), most labels follow AAFCO approved guidelines for content. It is important to remember that AAFCO does not tell feed manufacturers what they can and cannot use as feed ingredients. It merely sets standards as to what information is to be made available on the label.

All AAFCO approved labels include the following information:

**Product Name and Brand Name (if any)** States the name of the product and the brand it is marketed under. For example, in the Sweetlix 16:8 Meat Maker mineral, 16:8 Meat Maker is the product name and Sweetlix is the brand name.

**Purpose Statement** States the specific type of animal for which the feed is designed and any specific conditions that may apply. For example, “for meat goats on pasture” is a purpose statement. When the product name includes a description of the species and animal class, the purpose statement may be omitted.

**Guaranteed Analysis** This lists the amounts of nutrients that are guaranteed to be present in the feedstuff. The specific information required will vary according to the species for which the feed is intended. Requirements also vary slightly from state to state. Typically, most goat feeds will list the minimum amounts of crude protein, crude fat, vitamins and minerals (excluding calcium and salt which are listed as a range) included, as well as the maximum amount of crude fiber. State inspectors periodically test commercial feeds to make sure that they contain the amounts of nutrients stated in the guaranteed analysis. If a feed does not match its guaranteed analysis, the state will stop the sale of that feed and may levy fines against the feed manufacturer.

**Drug Purpose Statement** Medicated feeds are required to include the word “medicated” in addition to the intended purpose(s) of the added drug or drugs. The drug purpose statement may include specific conditions that qualify the drug claim(s). The label is also required to list the active drug ingredient(s) added and its concentration in the feed.

**Ingredients** A list of the ingredients found in the feed is required on the label. However, in order to protect the confidentiality of manufacturers' formulas and to allow flexibility to deal with ingredient availability, some major ingredients are often listed on the label in collective terms. Some commonly used collective terms are:

*Plant protein products* - represents one or more of 41 different feedstuffs including: various forms of soybeans, cottonseed, yeast and other plant meals.

*Grain products* – represents any of the normal forms (whole, cracked, ground, etc.) of several grain products such as corn, oats, barley, etc.

*Forage products* – represents inclusion of one or more of several different forages including alfalfa, coastal Bermuda, lespedeza, etc..

*Roughage products* – represents inclusion of one or more high roughage feedstuffs such as various types of hulls and pulps (cottonseed hulls, beet pulp, etc.).

*Processed grain by-products* – as the name implies, includes over 40 by-products of grain processing including wheat middlings, brewers dried grains, corn gluten feed, etc.

*Molasses products* - includes various forms of cane, citrus and beet molasses.

*Animal protein products* – includes various forms of animal by-products. The FDA prohibits use of mammalian protein sources in ruminant feeds, therefore, most feed manufacturers will not use this collective term on their label. Some approved animal protein products for ruminants include hydrolyzed poultry feathers, blood meal, fish meal, whey, dried milk, etc. If animal protein products are included in goat feeds, most manufacturers will list specific rather than collective terms.

The list of ingredients will also include all sources of minerals and any vitamins, preservatives or additives included. Minerals are typically listed in specific terms, for example, calcium carbonate, salt or sodium selenite. Every ingredient in the product must be accounted for either in collective or specific terms. Ingredients are often listed in order of the amount included in the feed from greatest to least; however, this is not a requirement. Some list ingredients in alphabetical order. Some combine the two methods and list the major ingredients in order of amount and the minor ingredients like trace minerals in alphabetical order.

**Feeding Directions** Feeding directions vary from vague statements to very detailed instructions. There are no guidelines on how detailed feeding directions need to be. Most directions will give you an indication of how much product should be consumed per head per day; for example, “feed to goats on pasture free choice at the rate of 2-4 oz. per head per day.” In some cases the instructions state a range of medication levels; for example, “feed continuously to provide not less than 60 mg or more than 200 mg of (drug) per head per day”. In these cases, you need to do a little math to determine the feeding rate. Let's assume that the drug in this example was included at a concentration of 800 mg/Lb. 60 mg divided by 800 mg/Lb equals 0.075 Lb. or 1.2 oz. For the upper range, 200 mg divided by 800 mg/Lb is 0.25 Lb. or 4 oz. Therefore, the feeding rate for this product is from 1.2 to 4 oz. per head per day.

**Warning or Cautionary Statements** Any applicable warnings or cautionary statements are either included as part of the feeding directions or listed separately. An example would be “Caution: contains added copper. Do not feed to sheep.”

An AFFCO approved label will also include the name and address of the manufacturer and a quantity statement, which lists the amount of product per unit.

In summary, in the United States, the sale of livestock feeds and feed supplements is regulated by the individual states. Most state regulatory agencies are members of AFFCO and thus follow AFFCO

guidelines concerning feed labels. All AFFCO approved labels contain the standard information listed above in various forms.

Next I will discuss how to take the information included on a feed label to make feeding management decisions and to compare products.

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