



Sure Champ®

IN THE CLASSROOM

How Fast Should I Increase Grain in my Show Animal's Diet and How Should I Introduce Supplements?

By: Dr. Susan Day, BioZyme® Nutritionist

There are lots of ideas about how and when feed changes should be made in a ruminant show animal's diet. Ruminant animals function naturally on a high forage diet. However, we expect our show animals to gain weight very quickly, and the addition of grain to the diet is the only way to successfully achieve the gains we desire.

The rumen of cattle, sheep and goats that are on a high forage diet has a higher pH than those on high grain diets. Forage digesting microbes thrive at that higher pH. As pH decreases with additional grain, the microbial population will shift toward starch digesters. Rapid changes from forage to a concentrate (grain) ration can result in unstable microbial populations, sub-acute or acute rumen acidosis, and livestock going off feed.

In order to minimize the negative side effects of increasing grain, ruminants should be "stepped up" to higher grain/higher energy diets gradually. Each step-up diet should be about 10% higher in energy than the prior diet. For cattle that will be 2-3 lb. grain per each step-up. Forage will also decrease 10-15% at each step. The animals should stay on each diet 5-7 days before increasing again. Typically, after each energy increase the dry matter intake will decrease slightly. Animals on low-energy diets quit eating when physically full, but animals on higher energy diets quit eating when biological feedback tells them they have consumed enough energy. It's important to let your animals tell you if they are ready. Don't switch your ration if any animals in the pen are sick or not eating properly. Show steers can eat 2-2.5% of their body weight in grain with 2-4 lb. of hay (fed free-choice), whereas show heifers are usually restricted to up to 2% of their body weight in grain with free-choice hay.

There are additives that can help with transition. Amaferm®, found in all of BioZyme's products, will also reduce the risk of bloat through its actions on lactic acid utilizing bacteria in the rumen. Lactic acid is a very strong acid (makes the rumen very acidic) so by increasing the bacterial population that uses it, we can increase the pH. Amaferm also helps keep animals eating consistently, which reduces chances of slug feeding.

Sure Champ® provides a complete package of vitamins and minerals, along with Amaferm, to help keep your animals on feed and prevent rumen acidosis. It can be fed to animals at any stage. Typically, once your show animals are weaned they can go onto Sure Champ starting at 0.5 lb. per head per day. That rate should be increased to the full 1 lb. feeding rate over a few weeks as the animal grows and intake increases. Because Sure Champ provides 25% protein, it also provides the protein necessary for maximal growth.

For additional livestock nutrition and stock show resources, visit surechamp.com/blog.