

HOW TO READ A COMMERCIAL FEED TAG

Interpreting a Feed Tag

Frank Pinkerton, Ph.D.
The Goat Works, Grapeland, TX

Goat owners typically purchase sack feeds, protein concentrates, vitamin and/or mineral supplements, and individual feed ingredients. Some may also have their own feeds custom processed/mixed. In any case, they need to be able to read and interpret feed tags.

The tags found on commercial feeds are a legal requirement of State Regulatory Agencies. State regulators belong to the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). This organization provides guidance to Feed Control Service Administrators concerning identification of feedstuffs, feed mixtures, minerals, vitamins, and feed additives including antibiotics. AAFCO does not tell feed manufacturers what they can or cannot put into mixed feeds nor does it police the products offered to buyers. Only Regulatory Service personnel can monitor and test feeds in their laboratory and thereafter notify manufacturers if their analyses does not match the feed tag guarantees. In certain circumstances a feed company can be brought to task by Regulators and penalties imposed. If a producer feels his purchased feed is not as shown on the tag, the producer may request the state Regulatory Agency to run a check.

AAFCO approved tags typically carry the brand name, its company address and numerically coded batch number as well as descriptive name (e.g., kid starter or grower or milking ration) and form designation (meal, pellet, coarse ground, etc.). If the feed contains any medication, the tag must identify the drugs and the concentration either in grams of additive per ton or in mg. per lb. Also, the *medicated tag* must carry a warning denoting withdrawal time in days prior to sale of animals or product therefrom if warranted. Most, but not all, tags also provide *directions* (how, when or quantity to feed per head per day).

The *guaranteed analysis* section of the tag typically reads: *Crude protein* not less than X%. A statement such as, "this includes not more than X% equivalent protein from non-protein nitrogen", must be added if all the protein is not from "natural" ingredients, i.e., urea.

Crude fat not less than X%. Note: The minimum fat required in daily rations for goats is not precisely known, but ranges of 1 to 5% seem adequate. Typical concentrate formulations shown on feed tag range from 1 to 3%; forages usually contain somewhat lesser amounts of fat.

Crude fiber not more than X%. The higher this figure, the lower the digestibility energy of the feed; the price should reflect this lesser energy, but frequently does not. Some manufactures also show minimum/maximum quantities of calcium and phosphorus and other macro and micro minerals. Units of vitamins A and D may also be shown; such figures are not required by AAFCO.

The *ingredients* listing on the tag does not identify individual feedstuffs. Instead, it uses *categories* of feedstuffs, e.g., *grains products* (such as corn, oats, barley, wheat), *processed grain by-products* (bran, brewers grain, hominy), *plant protein products* (soybean meal, cottonseed meal, etc.), *molasses products* (cane or beet molasses, dehydrated molasses, wood molasses), and *forage products* (alfalfa meal or leaf meal). The phrase, *roughage products*, identifies the presence of cottonseed hulls or other types of hulls or ground hays. This total must be shown as a percentage of the feed. Their presence will cause the crude fiber guarantee to be abnormally high (16-26% or more) and, as indicated above, lowers the digestible energy content.

The tag will also list sources of minerals, any preservatives used, and any vitamin supplements present or used.

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-