Evaluation of animal welfare and milk production of goat fed on diet containing hydroponically germinating seeds

Giuseppe Marsico, Elisabetta Micera, Salvatore Dimatteo, Fabrizio Minuti, Arcangelo Vicenti & Antonia Zarrilli

To cite this article: Giuseppe Marsico, Elisabetta Micera, Salvatore Dimatteo, Fabrizio Minuti, Arcangelo Vicenti & Antonia Zarrilli (2009) Evaluation of animal welfare and milk production of goat fed on diet containing hydroponically germinating seeds, Italian Journal of Animal Science, 8:sup2, 625-627, DOI: 10.4081/ijas.2009.s2.625

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.4081/ijas.2009.s2.625
Evaluation of animal welfare and milk production of goat fed on diet containing hydroponically germinating seeds

Giuseppe Marsico, Elisabetta Micera, Salvatore Dimatteo, Fabrizio Minuti, Arcangelo Vicenti, Antonia Zarrilli

Dipartimento di Produzione Animale, Università di Bari, Italy

Corresponding author: Antonia Zarrilli. Dipartimento di Produzione Animale, Facoltà di Medicina Veterinaria, Università di Bari. Strada prov.le per Casamassima km 3, 70010 Valenzano (BA), Italy Tel. +39 080 4679926 – Fax: +39 080 4679883 - Email: a.zarrilli@veterinaria.uniba.it

ABSTRACT - Hydroponic fodder is a particularly nutritious feed, rich in protein and vitamins such as β-carotene, trace elements and enzymes. It may also offer the advantage of a continuous availability. A pilot plant for hydroponically production of germinating seeds was built in an area of the same farm where the trial took place. Three homogeneous groups of 30 Jonica breed goats in lactation (4th-5th parity) were used to evaluate the effects of two different levels of partial dietary substitution with hydroponically germinating (h.g.) oat on plasma levels of cortisol and milk production. Germinated oat was used after 7 days of hydroponic growth. Control group (T) received only feed (fodder and oat integrated with complement feed). The other 2 groups were fed on diet containing different levels (1,5Kg - group A; 3Kg - group B) of hydroponically germinating oat. Goats showed a small interest in fresh feed during the trial period. The integration with hydroponically germinating oat in partial substitution of the traditional feed in the diet of goat did not significantly affect biochemical and haematological parameters.

Key words: Goat, Cortisol, Milk production, Hydroponics.

Introduction - Dairy goat and dairy sheep farming is a fundamental part of the national economy, especially the rural economy of many countries in the Mediterranean region (Boyazoglu, 2001). The two species are frequently reared together, although they are different under some points of view as disposition, temperament and productivity. In fact, goats are adapted to the difficult environment of marginal land and scarce feed (Kadim et al., 2006). Researchers can formulate diet in order to optimize milk-production and, at the same time, offer a suitable and balanced feeding to animals, also improving their welfare. Some reports (Peris et al., 1999; Bonanno et al., 2007) establish the importance of the rearing conditions for goat during lactation. It is known that hormones, as well as modulators and central neuropeptides, interact with the energetic pathway and consequently affect productive and reproductive performances. For these reasons a study on welfare should analyse haematic-chemical characteristics, serum protein and hormone levels as stress indicators (Walsberg, 2003; Romero et al., 2004; Scheneider et al., 2004). Researchers have been used several physiological indicators to assess welfare/stress in livestock. Stress in animal husbandry is related to changes in hormone levels and blood chemistry as well as behavioural reactions. The plasma content of cortisol is an effective indication of goat welfare (Kannan et al., 2000). It may be helpful to find new feeding systems, such as fodder produced hydroponically, which can offer a constant supply of food, characterized by a high protein level and mineral salts. This work aims to evaluate goat welfare and milk production when animals are fed on diet containing h.g. seeds. Data were recorded in order to assess the effects of this kind of diet and evaluate animal welfare (by biochemical, haematological and hormonal tests) and milk production.
Material and methods - The research was carried out in the agro-zootechnical farm “L’Aia Vecchia”, (Lecce, Apulia Region), between September 2006 and January 2007. Three homogeneous groups (10 subjects each one, 30 in total) of Jonica breed goats in lactation (4th-5th parity) were used for the trial. All the subjects were fed a daily ration per capita with 400g of feed and 700g of wheat straw as unifeed, (average moisture about 60%), by mixer wagon. In addition, the three groups received an integration of: 600g of feed for the first group, as control (T); 400g of feed and 1.5kg of h.g. oat in the second group (A); 200g of feed and 3kg of h.g. oat in the third group (B). The feed used was complete, balanced and pelleted, the same for all three groups. Chemical and nutritional characteristics of dry matter of diet for all groups were as follows: 16.5% crude protein, 25% crude fiber, 0.80UF for milk/ kg d.m. A pilot plant for h.g. seeds production was built in an area of the farm; h.g. oat was used after 7 days of hydroponic growth. The biochemical and haematological profiles, as well as the level of plasma cortisol and the daily milk production (7 controls every ten days) were recorded. Blood parameters were established on samples taken from the jugular vein of the animals between 8:00 and 9:30a.m., at the end of each month. Plasma cortisol amount was assessed by ELISA Kit (Medical Biological Service). Statistical analysis was performed by one way ANOVA. Differences were considered statistical significant when P<0.05, highly significant when P<0.001.

Results and conclusions - All the subjects displayed a little appeal to eat h.g. oat that had not been completely consumed, confirming the inclination of this species to select foodstuff. Data relating to biochemical and haematological profiles (not shown) were all in the physiological range, without any statistically significant change in the three groups of animals throughout the trial. The average values of plasma cortisol (ng/ml) in all groups at time 0 (before the introduction of hydroponics in the diet), after 1 and 2 months from the start of experiment are shown in Figure 1.
It was observed a progressive increase of cortisol during the time for all groups, proving that in goats the plasma levels of cortisol are higher during the winter than in other periods (Nelson et al., 2000; Al Busaidi et al., 2008), while for each sampling time of plasma cortisol no significant differences were detected among the three groups. The average daily milk yield (g/d) during the trial are shown in the Figure 2. It was noticed for all groups and for each decade of sampling a gradually decrease of daily milk yield, due to physiological trend of lactation. However, any relevant change in milk yield was never found among groups. In the end, we may conclude that the integration with h.g. oat in partial substitution of the traditional feed in the diet did not significantly influence physiological parameters of goat. The findings of this experiment are in disagreement with our other ones obtained by a simultaneous trial carried out on Comisana sheep (Micera et al., 2009). In our opinion, the use of a feed based on h.g. seeds improved sheep welfare and milk production in ewes (Micera et al., 2009), while did not determine any effect on goat physiological parameters. That is due probably to the behaviour of this last species about feeding fresh forage supplied in manger, considering that higher feed refusal estimations were recorded for forage grasses than leguminous fodder crops. It could be interesting to evaluate using of this kind of diet when it is supplying many times a day, since the metabolic effect of feed in goat accustomed to eat little and numerous intakes throughout the day (Abijaoudè et al., 2000).

This work was supported by a grant of Apulia Region PE_070 B.A.L.ID.O.

REFERENCES – Abijaoudè, J.A., Morand-Fehr, P., Tessier, J., Schmidely, Ph., Sauvant, D., 2000. Contribution of main and secondary meals to the daily intake of stall-housed dairy goats in mid lactation. In: Ledin I., Morand-Fehr (eds.). Sheep and goats nutrition: Intake, digestion, quality of products and rangeland. Cahiers Hoptions Méditerranéennes, 52:33-37. Al-Busaidi, R., Johnson, E.H., Osman Mahgoub, S., 2008. Seasonal variations of phagocytic response, immunoglobulin G (IgG) and plasma cortisol levels in Dhofari goat. Small Rum. Res. 79:118-123. Bonanno, A., Di Grigoli, A., Stringi, L., Di Miceli, G., Giambalvo, D., Tornambé, G., Vargetto, D., Alicata, M.L., 2007. Intake and milk production of goats grazing sulla forage under different stocking rates. Ital. J. Anim. Sci. 6:605-607. Boyazoglu, J., Morand-Fehr, P., 2001. Mediterranean dairy sheep and goat products and their quality. A critical review. Small Rum. Res. 40:1-11. Kadim, I.T., Mahgoub, O., Al-Kindi, A., Al-Marzooqi, W., Al-Saqri, N.M., 2006. Effects of transportation at high ambient temperatures on physiological responses, carcass and meat quality characteristics of three breeds of Omani goats. Meat Science, 73:626-634. Kannan, G., Terrill, T.H., Kouakou, B., Gazal, O.S., Gelaye, S., Amoah, E.A., Samake, S., 2000. Transportation of goats: effects on physiological stress responses and live weight loss. J. Anim. Sci. 78:1450–1457. Micera, E., Ragni, M., Minuti, F., Rubino, G., Marsico, G., Zarrilli, A., 2009. Improvement of animal welfare and milk production of sheep fed on diet containing hydroponically germinating seeds. Proceeding of the ASPA 18th Congress, in press. Nelson, R.J., Drazen, D.L., 2000. Seasonal changes in stress responses. In Encyclopedia of Stress. Academic press, 402-408. Peris, S., Caja, G., Such, X., 1999. Relationships between udder and milking traits in Murciano-Granadina dairy goats. Small Rum. Res. 33:171-179. Romero, L.M., 2004. Physiological stress in ecology: lesson from biomedical research. Trends Ecol. Evol. 5:249-255. Schneider, J.E., 2004. Energy balance and reproduction. Physiol. Behav. 81, 2:289-317. Walsberg, G. E., 2003. How useful is energy balance as a overall index of stress in animals? Horm. Behav. 43:16-17.