

Magic Powder and Foo Foo Dust

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One only has to open any youth livestock magazine to find page after page of advertisements touting the “Championship: advantages of various top-dresses and feed additives. One of the most common questions I receive is “Do these things really work?” Unfortunately, this question is one that is almost impossible to answer because every animal is different in its ability to convert feedstuffs and feed additives into muscle and fat tissue. These differences are literally impossible to identify by looking at an animal. Yes, I agree that when we evaluate prospects, there are things we look at to determine if an animal will be an easy feeder such as, body volume, rib shape, chest width, etc. But how an animal converts feedstuffs and top-dresses is probably more related to its genetic make-up rather than its phenotype.

No matter whom you ask, every feeder has their own “secret weapon” or “magic recipe” they use to give their projects that little extra pop or pizzazz that is required to be successful in the show ring. These additives range from a single top-dress to an elaborate mixture of products. Regardless of the products used, it is important to understand what each of these products do and to know what your goat needs in order to know which of these products to consider using.

The most common types of additives are those that add “bloom” or condition to an animal. These types of additives have been around a long time. We have all fed prospects that we could not get over the hump in terms of getting that “12 o’clock” finish. This classification of additives utilizes two approaches in achieving their effectiveness. The first attribute of these additives is to simply increase feed intake. Many of these top-dresses contain high levels of yeast that are designed to keep the kids’ rumen functioning properly. We all know that if the gut is in good working order, the kid will be more likely to consume larger quantities of feed. More feed means more body weight, more body weight means more condition, assuming we are past the inflection point.

The other approach for this type of feed additive is higher energy densities. As we have discussed in previous issues, energy levels are the key in getting the prospects to “bloom.” The simplest way to increase energy levels is by adding additional fat to a ration. (Fat is 2.5 times higher in energy than corn.) A ration can contain as much as 5-6 percent fat. Although some rations may be higher in fat, BE CAREFUL! Extremely high fat levels can turn to soap in the rumen and can also cause the infamous “screen door squirts.” Regardless of how the desired effect is achieved, simply be careful using “bloom” feeds because they may work too well and result in a fat goat.

With that said, I am also comfortable that we have all had kids that we simply got too fat and we faced the difficult task of trying to “lean” the prospect back to show condition. Exercise programs are key to preventing and/or solving this problem. However, the use of fat-burning top-dresses make this chore much easier to accomplish. These types of additives, once again, work in two ways. Much like the popular diets of today, these additives are generally very high in protein. These extremely high protein levels aid in “burning” off fat reserves and thus aid in “leaning” out our prospects. Another means by which these compounds work is by altering the animal’s Krebs’ cycle (Metabolism rate). When we crank up an animal’s need for energy, the kid’s body will find some means by which to acquire this energy. If they do not receive this additional requirement in their feed, they will remove fat stores from their body to meet this requirement. The result is a leaner, trimmer kid. Once again,

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CAUTION! If a little is good—a lot is not always better. Once the fat stores are gone, the next thing to go is muscle.

Almost all additives claim to increase muscle mass and shape. This is easily the hardest claim to prove from a nutritional standpoint. Most muscle enhancing additives work by improving bloom and freshness. Many muscle enhancing top-dresses utilize specific mineral and fat enhancing compounds to achieve the appearance of increased muscle. These compounds work by improving feed intake and likewise nutrient conversion. This results in improved rate-of-gain, increased bloom and thus has a benefit of improved muscle shape. Other additives in this classification work by improving overall health and respiration of the animal. This improvement in animal health will likewise result in improved performance and efficiency and then once again in the added benefit of muscle shape.

As you stand around ring-side watching that next goat show, listen to the people talk around you. You will hear the virtues of any and all feed additives extolled to the masses. One person will tout “Product A” as the greatest thing since sliced bread while his neighbor on your other side will swear that the stuff is useless and just plain does not work. Friends, use your good judgment – No product exists that will turn a sorry goat into a great champion. All these products that are available are based on differing areas of ruminant nutrition. Will every product work on every goat? Absolutely not! But each is designed to enhance or aid in developing your prospect to reach his genetic potential. Ask questions of the manufacturers, talk to friends who used various additives, do the research yourself. Many people have achieved great success in utilizing these products and as well, many have received the purple banner by simply using sound nutrition and having a great exercise program. Either way, these products are not a shortcut to success. Understand what these additives do and likewise understand what your goat needs—maybe all that is keeping you from the winner’s circle is a little “**magic powder**” and a spoonful of “**foo foo dust.**”