

Feeding of Growing Ostrich

General

Ostrich are suitable for the export market at 96 kg to 105 kg live weight. These weights are associated with carcass weights of 43 kg plus. Dressing out % is variable due to fat cover. Fat is removed before carcass weights are measured and dressing out % is in the range of 42% (fat bird) to 50% (lean bird).

Birds for finishing are purchased at around 40 kg live weight in the autumn. They are available from the end of January.

The 60 kg live weight gain from purchase to sale for slaughter, at an average of 300 g/day will take about 7 - 8 months. So February purchased birds should be sold about September, and May purchased birds sold about December/January. Balanced feeding is important in achieving these targets.

Feed requirement

Feed requirement is not as well defined as it is for grazing ruminants and the following recommendations are based as much on practical experience as they are on published data.

The estimates of energy requirements are 15 to 25 MJ ME/bird/day. This equates to 1.5 to 2.5 kg DM/bird per day. In addition to energy, protein is very important. Ostrich are not ruminants therefore essential amino acids, vitamins and minerals need to be supplied.

Feeding of ostrich is based on complementing pasture with grain and commercial feed (to provide essential amino acids, vitamins and minerals).

Late summer and autumn (40 – 60 kg live weight; expected growth 300 – 500g/d). Pasture plus 0.6 kg/d barley or wheat plus 0.2 kg commercial feed.

Winter (50 – 70 kg live weight; expected growth 150 – 300 g/d)
Pasture plus 0.7 – 1.0 kg/d grain plus 0.2 kg/day commercial feed. Grain feeding depends on climatic conditions and pasture supply.

Spring and summer (60 – 100 kg live weight; expected growth 250 – 400 g/d). Pasture plus 0.5 kg/day grain.

Stocking rate

Growing ostrich have similar size and weight gain to that of a weaner deer. Ostrich do not exhibit the winter intake and growth shown by deer. Winter growth rates of over 300 g/d on good pasture feeding plus grain have been reported.

As the feeding of grain is considerably higher than ruminants of similar size the pasture intake is reduced. For growing ostrich pasture intake is similar to that of a well grown hogget. To determine stocking rate, I would suggest that similar to hogget's is good starting point.

Types of feed

Quality pasture that gives high growth rates for lambs, calves or fawns is ideal for growing ostrich. They will also eat most crops that are used in pastoral systems, such as brassicas. They also will eat silage, hay (particularly if chaffed) and balage. There have been a number of crop by products used successful such as grape pressings, brewers grain, pea straw. Essentially anything other stock will eat ostrich will eat.

Grazing management

Ostrich tend to graze more at the end of the paddock nearest home (the gate from which food is delivered), and less furthers away. To help achieve more even grazing often the feed troughs are furthers from the gate. Alternatively, using another class of stock to follow ostrich is useful. I finish lambs by grazing them either after the ostrich or grazing together. The disadvantage of grazing together is that lambs can learn that grain feeding is available and will dominate ostrich at feeding time!