FEEDS AND FEEDING OF DROMEDARY CAMELS: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Camels are remarkable animals that have evolved with a ruminant like digestive system to enable them to survive on low quality feeds. Being browsers, camels are able to select high quality diets, which they can efficiently digest. Camels are pseudo-ruminants, with a simple chambered fore-stomach, and are unlike the four chambered stomach found in cattle and sheep. Nevertheless, camels can digest high fibre feeds via fermentation pathways similar to those in true ruminants. The camel can survive on all sorts of vegetation including shrubs, weeds, grasses, tree leaves etc. and maintains their body condition. But camel usually prefers to browse (feeding tree leaves and twigs) rather than to graze particularly when green grasses are available. The crude protein content of grasses ranges from 5.9 to 10.2% except blue panic (*Panicum antidotale*) which had 15.6% CP contents. The dromedary camels spend 6-12 hours grazing daily under natural range conditions and plant matter intake varies from 5 to 55 kg/d depending on the season and feed availability. The camels have lower energy requirements than ruminants, and have evolved an efficient mechanism for nutrient recycling. Vitamins are included in feed supplement of livestock and poultry but in most of camel farming systems, only vitamins present in the natural diet are available for the animals. The mineral deficiencies which are widely present in domestic species notably may occur in camel both for major or minor elements. In general, the camels under rangelands feeding systems are not fed sufficiently to meet their nutrient requirements for pregnancy, lactation and growth, therefore dromedary camels should be supplemented with concentrate mixture during physiological conditions.

Key words: Dromedary camels, feeds, feeding, nutrient requirements