

Grazing in olive groves

The benefits of olive leaves for feeding sheep

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Valorization of residues for high quality sheep nutrition

Olive leaves may be successfully used in animal diets mostly fresh when the nutritive value is greater.

In lactating animals, olive tree leaves improve milk fat quality due to the high linolenic acid content, compared to diets based on conventional forages.

Feeding olive tree leaves has also a positive effect on the fatty acid profile of cheese and therefore improves its human nutrition quality.



A virtuous cycle to valorize synergies

Olive leaves include branches and leaves and they can be utilized fresh, ensiled, dried or as a component of concentrate pellets.

In a silvopastoral system, pruning residues are left on the field and, after the branches have been cleaned by sheep, they are chopped. In spring, the sheep will continue to feed olive leaves, contributing to the control of the suckers.



An important feeding resource for ruminants and soils

Sheep can successfully graze in orchards which have been pruned to a minimal height of 1.6 m, without noticeable losses in olive yields.

On the other hand, keeping the olive orchard at that height can reduce the humidity rate in the lower part of the crown of the olive trees contrasting pathogens.

Olive residues and animal manure contribute to soil fertility.



Highlights

- Olive orchard grazing reduce treatment costs and chemical inputs.
- Sheep benefit from a good source of grass and so reduce cutting costs of weeds and olive shoots. In periods with food shortages, the olive leaves can supplement their diet reducing concentrate needs.
- In lactating sheep, feeding with olive leaves leads to an improvement in the quality of milk fat compared to diets based on conventional forages.



Need to consider

- Feeding olive leaves to ruminants could have a potential toxic effect due to chemical treatments applied;
- The availability of olive leaves is seasonal and their use in animal feeding over the whole year should require adequate preservation and storage.
- Olive leaves are fibrous with a low digestibility and crude protein, and they promote very poor rumen fermentation.

Thanks for the attention!

