How to Raise Small Ruminants Profitably and Sustainably

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6/15/18
Why Sheep or Goats

• Suited to small farms, seniors and women
• Good meat market
• Low start-up cost
• Co-species grazing with cattle or horses
• Early puberty and high reproductive rate
Profitable Niches for Sheep or Goats

- Vegetation control on unused land
- Control of brush, weeds and sericea lesp.
- Integrated with cropping systems
- Rotation between pasture and cropland
- Grazing cover crops
- Grazing crop residues
Suitability of Sheep and Goats for Homestead

• Provide meat for family
• Provide milk/cheese/yogurt/soap
• Provide fiber for spinning
• Companion animal
Resource Requirements

- Windbreak/shade
- Fencing
- Water
- Land
Which Small Ruminant?

- Goats - brush/companion animal
- Sheep - hair or wool grass and weeds
- Dairy goats - family milk
- Cashmere goats and wool sheep for fiber
Sources of Sheep and Goat Information

- Individual producers
- Producer groups
- University and extension
- Internet
Visit Goat Producers

- Why do they have sheep or goats?
- What is their animal management plan-breeding season, kidding date, weaning, pastures, fence, wintering, and predators
- What is their health program-vaccination, diseases treatment/prevention, worms
- Animal sales
- What are their animal facilities
Producers Group

• Locate breed associations and clubs on internet
• Meet other producers
• Participate in educational activities
• Locate sources of animals
• Many have web sites such as http://www.katahdins.org
University and Extension

• Most States have a State Sheep and Goat Specialist
• Some local extension educators know something about goats or sheep
• University web sites such as www.luresext.edu
• Meat Goat and Dairy Goat Handbook
• ATTRA website
Visit Sheep and Goat Auctions

- Meet other goat producers
- What do goats sell for
- Quality factors
- Seasonal price patterns
- What to look for in an animal
- NOT source of breeding animals
Internet Information

- Lot of good information and disinformation on the web.
- No responsibility for information
- University and breed organizations are most reliable sources
- List servers for goats, meat goats, wool sheep and hair sheep. eXtension website
- www.sheepandgoat.com
Important Considerations in Goat Production

- Parasites (worms)
- Predators
- Fencing
Predator Problems

• Neighborhood dogs
• Coyotes
• Less common
• Bobcat, cougar, wolves, bear, feral hogs, eagles, black-headed vultures and ravens
Predators Protection

- Guard dogs
- Donkeys and Llama
- Night lot
- Electric fence
- Federal trapper
Internal Parasites

• Worm control program
• Problem of dewormer resistant worms
• Cull wormy animals
• Fecal egg counts or check eye color
• Internal parasite workshop
• Need to know more about worm management than sheep or goat management
Internal Parasite Management

- Don’t graze close to the ground
- Moderate stocking rate
- Rotational grazing rest period > 35 days
- Hay pastures
- Sericea lespedeza and browse helps
- Some breeds/individuals are more resistant to worms than others
- www.wormx.info
New Fences

- Net wire fence with barbed wire on top $6,000/mile materials
- Sheep and Goat wire 1047
- High Tensile Goat Tuff net wire
- Electric Fence  4 strand 30” high
- $2,000/mile
Converting Old Fences

- Sheep and Goat wire
- 3 extra strands of barbed wire & stays
- 1 or 2 strands of electric fence on outriggers
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Rules for Electric Fence

• Put up with quality materials
• Train animals to it
• Daily, check and maintain 4500 V
Miscellaneous SR Knowledge

- Goats require copper, sheep little copper
- Require fiber (forage/hay) in the diet
- Susceptible to coccidiosis-usually stress and lack of sanitation
- Internal parasite/dewormer resistance
Keys to Preventative Health

- Good nutrition
- Minimize stress
- Vaccinate
- Control worms
- Cull
- Biosecurity - Don’t bring germs in
Vaccination

- Enterotoxemia ‘Overeating’ Tetanus
- Caseous lymphadenitis “Cheesy gland”
- Prior to weaning
- Four weeks later
- Annually 4 wks before kidding/lambing
- Bucks annually
- Abortion diseases as per vet prescription
Production Cycle

- Breed Nov 15
- Vaccinate mid-March
- Kid April 15 when forage is available
- Wean September
- Castrate?
- Market?
Sample Goat Wintering Programs

- Forage-stockpiled pasture or hay
- Feed round bales in a hay feeder
- Range cubes, pellets or whole corn
- Appropriate mineral supplement
- Need some supplemental feed in early lactation.
- Need to know more about pasture management than animals
Getting Ready for Goats

• Visit goat producers, auctions
• Collect information from the Web
• Extension and producers groups
• Make a business plan and budget
• Buy from a reputable producer
• Be prepared for arrival of goats
Make a Business Plan

- Reason for having goats
- Plan your production cycle
- Plan your production goals
- Develop contingency plans for drought or disease outbreaks
- Budget using production cycle and goals
Sample Meat Goat Budget

- Income
- 1.5 kids/doe weaned
- -.25 kids for replacement
- 1.25 kids to sell
- 55lb kid @ $2.00/lb * 1.25 = 137.50.
- .20 cull for $60.00 = 12.00
- Total Income $149.50
Meat Goat Budget Expenses

- Fencing $5.-10./hd
- Pasture 5.-20.
- Health 4.-8.
- Buck service 5.-8.
- Replacement 5.-20.
- Winter feeding 10.-30.
- Minerals & water 6.-12.
Meat Goat Budget Summary

- Income $149.50
- Expenses $40. - 108.
- Profit $109.50 – 41.50
Purchase from Reputable Producers

- Locate breeders with your type of production system and breed
- Select healthy, physically sound animals
- Expect to pay more than auction price
- Start early locating animals
- Expect more problems with animals bought from auctions
- Start small 20-30 hd
Prices for Quality SR

- Doe or ewe female $200-400.
- Buck or ram $400-600.
- Young buck can service 25-35 does.
- Young ram can service 20-25 ewes.
- Mature buck can service 40-75 does.
- Mature ram can service 40-50 ewes.
Locate Sources of Feed and Supplies

- Visit local feedstore/ag supply
- Dewormer, vaccine, medicine, corral panels, feeders, waterers etc.
- Locate feed/hay
- Mail order vaccines/dewormers
- Only buy what you have to!
Prepare for Animal Arrival

• Pasture fenced for goats
• Predator control
• Waterers/feeders
• Vaccination/deworm
• Handling facilities
• Coccidiosis prevention
Conclusion

• Get informed
• Get planned
• Get ready
• Get sheep or goats