Raising Meat Goats on Pasture

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Top 10 Reasons Not to Raise Goats

1. You have to be smarter than everything that wants to kill them.
2. You have to be smarter than goats
3. Parasite Problems
4. Predator Problems
5. Fencing – keeping them in!
6. Hoof problems
7. Weather problems (kidding, parasites)
8. Lack of infrastructure (marketing, veterinary expertise, animal health products, feed products, knowledge, research)
9. Higher labor requirements (kidding, hoof care, parasite control, marketing)
10. You’re not going to get rich quick

Management Considerations

- Predator Control
- Fencing
- Facilities
- Parasite Control
- Pasture & Grazing Management
- Marketing
- Advantages

Predator Control

- Guard Animal + Effective Predator Fencing
- Guard dog, Llama, donkey - dogs best on larger and brushier farms. Llamas and donkeys work well on smaller operations.
- Fencing - 7 - 8 wire HT power fence for perimeter

Fencing for Sheep & Goats

- HT electric/power
  - 6 - 8 wire perimeter
  - 2 - 6 wire interior

- Woven wire
  - 39" + 1-2 barbed or electric
  - Wider mesh preferred

Electric Fencing

- Both sheep & goats can be trained to respect electric fencing
- Perimeter should be 6 - 8 wires at least 42" tall
  - bottom wire 6 - 8" from the ground
  - 6 to 12 inch spacing between wires
  - alternating hot and ground wires
• Goats can be controlled with 3 or more strands of HT electric wire for subdivision fencing
• 2 polywires have been successful for stripgrazing as long as forage supplies are adequate
• Electric netting is also available for temporary fencing

Conventional Fencing
• Woven wire is effective but expensive
  – 6 x 12” mesh is preferred to minimize horned goats getting caught
  – Wider spacing (24” – 36”) now available, less expensive

Electric Gate – Ozark Style
utilizing 6 - 8 strands of polytape and UV stabilized PVC pipe

Conventional Fencing
• May run an electric offset wire 12 - 15’ from the ground to reduce animals getting caught or climbing on fence
• 6 - 8 strand barbed wire can work or 4 - 5 strand with at least 2 electric offset wires.
• Conventional fencing is generally more expensive and less flexible

Shelter
• Barn Space
  – 10 – 15 sq. ft. per animal in open housing with pasture
  – 20 sq. ft. - 30 sq. ft. exercise area in confinement systems
  – Open shed – 6 – 10 sq. ft./goat; 4’ – 6’ high in rear; 6 – 8’ high in front; open to south
• Lambing/Kidding Jugs
  – 4’ x 4’ – 5’ x 5’

Shelter
• Natural shelter
• Portable shelter that can be used as a portable creep feeder for kids. (mineral feeders attached)
Handling small numbers of sheep and goats

- A pen where the sheep/goats can be crowded is usually sufficient.
- Get in pen and restrain sheep/goats by horns, under chin, with halter, against gate, straddling them, etc.
- Feed sheep/goats in pen to get them used to it.
- Be careful of horns and sudden movements.

Crowding pen

Large pen
Sized to fit entire herd
2 – 4 sq. ft/ kid
5 – 6 sq. ft/doe
Solid sides

To pasture or loading ramp

Handling large numbers of sheep and goats

- A more elaborate handling system is usually required.
- Can be permanent or portable.
- Can be constructed from steel, aluminum, or wood.
- Can be homemade or purchased.
- Chute – 10’ long x 4’ high x 12’ wide solid sides

Parasite Control/Prevention

- Parasites can be major problem
- Control and Prevention need to be planned
  - Select animals for parasite resistance
  - Grazing management
    - Watch grazing heights – not less than 4”
    - Longer rest periods to help break cycle (>40 days)
    - Grazing cattle in rotation with sheep or goats
    - Haying in rotation
    - Cropping in rotation
    - Strategic Deworming program
    - FAMACHA & FEC

Graze cattle or cut hay in combination with rotational grazing

1. Have an 8 paddock or more grazing system in place
2. Start rotating goats/sheep through half the paddocks
3. Cut hay or have cattle grazing through other half
4. When each herd finishes cycle through half – switch to other side
5. Same can be done with hay

Rotate with Cattle or Hay

- Move every 3 – 5 days
- Gives each pasture a 15 – 30 day rest
- Gives double that for each species of livestock
- Helps maintain forage quality & clean up pastures
- Can be done with hay also

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goats</th>
<th>Cows/Hay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Grazing Management Objectives:

- Manage forage to meet animal nutritional needs
- Maintain pasture condition/health
- Manage internal parasite levels
Strategies:

- Utilize proper stocking rates
  - Don’t overstock
- Utilize animal grazing behavior to an advantage
  - Proper grazing heights
  - Utilize browse
  - Utilize plants high in tannins

Strategies, cont’d.

- Utilize rotational grazing management
  - Manage plant rest periods for plant health, forage quality, lower parasite levels
  - Utilize cattle or hay in rotation

Utilize proper stocking rates

- Lower stocking rates & higher residuals will generally have less of a parasite build up in the pasture

How many goats can you stock?

How many goats can you stock?

- It depends upon your management system and resources.
  - Each farm has a different set of resources to use to raise livestock.
    - Land, labor, management and capital

How many goats can you stock?

- Pasture stocking rates vary by . . .
  - Pasture quality/production
  - Rainfall: amount and distribution,
  - Pasture species
  - Time of year/month/season
  - Soil fertility – lime, N, P, K
  - Amount of supplementation
  - Grazing management – continuous, rotational, intensive

Stocking Rate Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pasture Type</th>
<th>Cows</th>
<th>Sheep</th>
<th>Goats</th>
<th>Cows + Goats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent Pasture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 - 6</td>
<td>6 - 8</td>
<td>1 + 1 – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brushy Pasture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6 - 7</td>
<td>9 - 11</td>
<td>1 + 2 - 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush Eradication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 – 12 / ac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable browse mgmt.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 – 3 / ac</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kennedy - 2002
Match animals to resources

- A lot of the health and other problems with sheep and goats is directly related to not letting a goat be a goat or a sheep be a sheep – they are ruminants!
- Use animals that fit your land and forage resources

Grazing Habits/Preferences

- Goats
  - Prefer browse over grass
  - Prefer some forbs over grass
  - Prefer grass over clover
  - Prefer taller plants
  - Prefer rough, steep land over flat, smooth
  - Tend to graze perimeter before center of pasture
  - Graze from the top down
  - Don’t like to graze closer than 4"
  - Graze in uniform layers

Grazing Preference dependent on forages available, animals experience, stock density and timing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desired Browse</th>
<th>Desired Forbs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiflora rose</td>
<td>Chicory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackberry</td>
<td>Lespedeza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenbriar</td>
<td>Red clover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honeysuckle</td>
<td>Ragweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey locust</td>
<td>Lambsquarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumac</td>
<td>Sericea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willow</td>
<td>Kudzu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persimmon/sassafras</td>
<td>Crown vetch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak</td>
<td>Poison ivy/oak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walnut</td>
<td>Spotted knapweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Grape</td>
<td>Pigweed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grazing Preference dependent on forages available, animals experience, stock density and timing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intermediate Grasses</th>
<th>Intermediate Forbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bermudagrass</td>
<td>Ironweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluegrass</td>
<td>Spiny amaranth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broomsedge</td>
<td>Curly dock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian bluestem</td>
<td>Pokeweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buttercup</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White clover</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thistle</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bur dock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ox-eye daisy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Queen Anne’s lace</td>
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</tbody>
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Diet Preferences

However, there is regular crossover among the 3 types of feeders as diet preferences and food availability changes throughout the year.
Grazing Preference dependent on forages available, animals experience, stock density and timing

- Undesirable Species
  - Horsenettle
  - Perilla mint
  - Wooly Croton
  - Lanceleaf Ragweed (until after frost)
  - Wild Cherry (poisonous if wilted)
  - Switchgrass (may cause photosensitivity)
  - Alsike clover (may cause liver damage)

Utilize goat grazing behavior to an advantage

- Include browse plants in grazing system
  - Goats love browse
  - The higher from the ground they eat the less likely they are to pick up parasite larvae
  - A lot of browse plants are higher in tannins
  - High tannin diets reduce reproduction of internal parasites

Possible Plants with Condensed Tannins or other Secondary Compounds that Help Control Internal Parasites?

- Sericea Lespedeza
- Annual lespedeza
- Birdfoot trefoil
- Arrowleaf clover
- Berseem clover
- Crown vetch
- Chicory
- Oak leaves/acorns
- Walnut leaves
- Mulberry
- Mimosa
- Acacia
- Autumn olive
- Multiflora-rose

Utilize grazing behavior to an advantage

- Utilize plants high in tannins
  - Goats tend to intake higher levels of tannins than other ruminants

Utilize rotational grazing management

- To manage forage quality to meet animal nutritional needs
- To maintain pasture condition/health
- To manage internal parasite levels
Plant Growth Phases

Grazing in the Spring
- Keep pastures vegetative – early boot
- Rotate frequently (no longer than 5 days in a pasture) - increases intake of high quality plants – prevents regrowth from being eaten too soon
- Rest pastures 20 – 30 days – allow plants time to recover and provide adequate quantity of high quality forage
- Rotate with cattle or haying

Grazing During Summer
- Try to have cool season pastures fully utilized by the end of June – then rest all summer if possible
- For summer, graze warm season grass pastures, lespedeza, alfalfa, chicory
  - Taller growing natives allow the animals to graze higher off the ground
  - Provide by-pass protein

Grazing During Summer
- Graze regrowth in hayfields that were cut in spring
- Utilize weedy/brushy pastures during summer
- Hinge cut cull trees from woods for goats to browse
  - Allows goats to eat higher off the ground
  - Provides high tannin diet
  - Allows cool season pastures to rest

Grazing during Fall & Winter
- Start using cool season pastures again
  - They have had a 60 – 90 day rest during the summer
  - Defer grazing on some pastures to stockpile for winter grazing
- Allow warm season pastures to rest all winter
- Rotate similar to spring but stay in each pasture a little longer to give a longer rest period (35 – 40 days)
  - Forage quality doesn’t drop as quickly in the fall
- Utilize Stockpiled Fescue for winter feed
  - Stripgraze to improve utilization

Stripgrazing Stockpiled Fescue
Marketing Goats

• Know what your marketing options are
  – Direct marketing to consumers
  – Marketing direct to processor
  – Auctions
  – Pooled/graded sales
• What the market wants
  – Size and age
  – Timing – ethnic holidays
• Where the markets are
  – Local
  – National – can be found on the internet
    • http://www.ams.usda.gov/

So…. Why raise goats?

• Less land needed
• Less investment required
• Growing demand for products from various ethnic populations (which are also growing)
• Growing popularity of meat goat enterprises.
  • Multi-purpose animals
    ➔ Reproductive efficiency
    ➔ Efficient foragers
    ➔ Vegetation control
  • Easy to handle
  ➔ More profit potential

Economic Comparison

• Cattle
  – 1 cow/calf unit/3 ac
  – 95% calf crop
  – 500 lb. weaning weight
  – 475 lbs. weaned/ 3ac
  – $1.30/lb.
  – $617.50 gross/3 ac
  – 158.3 lbs./ac
  – $205.83 gross/ac
• Goats
  – 8 goat/kid units/3 ac
  – 150% kid crop
  – 60 lb weaning weight
  – 720 lbs. weaned/3 ac
  – $1.30/lb.
  – $936.00 gross/3 ac
  – 240 lbs./ac
  – $312.00 gross/ac

Increasing Inventory/Equity

Reproductive Efficiency

• Goats/Sheep
  – Start with 1 doe
  – Save all females for 5 years - sell all males
  – 150% kid crop
  – 50/50 doe/buck kids
  – At the end of 5 years:
    • 24 females in herd
    • 24 males sold
• Cattle
  – Start with 1 cow
  – Save all females for 5 years - sell all males
  – 95% calf crop
  – 50/50 heifer/bull calves
  – At the end of 5 years:
    • 5 females in herd
    • 5 males sold

Want to sell Multiflora rose, Buckbrush, Sericea or Ironweed for $500.00/ton?

• Get goats!
  – It takes about 5 pounds of intake to get 1 lb. gain
  – Current 60 – 70 lb kid prices = $1.25/lb
  – $1.25/5 = $0.25
  – $0.25 x 2000 = $500

Goats in Land and Forage Management

• In a NC State study, after 4 years of goat grazing pastures containing herbaceous weeds, vines, multiflora rose, blackberry and hardwood sprouts, pastures became dominated with grass and clover
• In a West Virginia study goats reduced brush cover from 45% to less than 15% in one season.
• In an Ohio State University study, goats eliminated 92% of the multiflora rose in 1 season, however it took up to 4 years for total elimination
Controlling Sericea Lespedeza with Goats

- Research and field experience in OK & KS
  - Reduced seeds per stem from 960 to 3
  - No new seedling spread
  - Reduction in stem count (25 – 30%)
- Research at Langston University in OK
  - Stocked at 6-8 goats/ac year 1, 4 – 6/ac. year 2, 3 – 4/ac. year 3
  - End of 3rd year virtually no live sericea plants
  - Left 1 goat/ac. thereafter to control germinating seedlings
  - Weaned goats gained about .3 lb/hd/day during the summer on Sericea

Special thanks to:
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University of Maryland Cooperative Extension
sschoen@umd.edu – www.sheepandgoat.com
For the use of some of her slides

Thank You

Questions? Comments, Discussion?