

Raising Goats for Profit in South Florida

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Why would anyone want to raise goats? Aren't they smelly and don't they head butt? Yes, they do have an odor, especially the males, and they can become aggressive if not handled properly. But goat production is one of the fastest-growing segments of agriculture in South Florida.

The reasons for raising goats are many. They are smaller than cattle and require less land area. They are more affordable than cattle or horses and they make excellent 4-H or FFA projects for county fairs. Goat meat is in high demand among many of Florida's ethnic populations, especially around holidays such as Eid ul-Fitr and Cinco de Mayo. Besides all that, goats have interesting personalities and are fun to raise.

Producing high-quality salable goats requires careful planning. Too often goat producers simply allow multiple males, called bucks, to run with their females, called does, throughout the year. In herds like this it is not uncommon to experience up to 50 percent mortality at birthing time, also known as kidding. Producers who breed year-round do not have a management plan. Consequently, they cannot know when to vaccinate or treat for worms, etc. because their goats are at different stages of production all year.

What follows is a brief description of best management practices for goat reproduction in South Florida.

Selection Criteria

Does

1. Purchase from a reputable goat producer.
2. Should weigh a minimum of 55 lbs. or two-thirds of adult weight at breeding.
3. Udder should be examined for size, lumps and other abnormalities.
4. Needs good appetite and alert eyes.
5. Do not purchase from small animal auctions or markets. This is where some producers dispose of culls.

Bucks

1. One-year-old breeder buck that has successfully mated at least once is desirable.
2. Buck must come from a doe that often gives birth to twin kids.
3. Buck must be active and ready to breed with in-heat does.

Care of the Breeding Buck

The breeding buck should be confined separately but always visible to the does. Provide a loafing area with a covered roof. One- or two-year-old bucks can make 25 to 50 doe services per year, an older buck even more.

Breeding

Does begin coming into heat from 4 to 8 months of age depending upon breed and level of nutrition. Females will come into heat every 18 to 21 days unless they become pregnant. Pregnancy lasts about 150 days. Best breeding age would be 10 to 12 months depending on desired weight. Limit yearling bucks to 25 doe services per year. Older bucks can provide up to 75 doe services per year. One buck is needed for every 25 does.

Kidding

Provide human assistance during the kidding process if needed. The best advice is to be near but out of sight. Seek the assistance of a veterinarian or experienced goat producer if the doe does not make significant progress within 45 minutes of severe straining.

On Aug. 1-2, 2009, the first Florida Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Conference will be held at Osceola Heritage Park in Kissimmee. The event will feature exhibitors, educational sessions and more. All Florida farmers are invited to attend. Visit the conference Web site at <http://smallfarms.ifas.ufl.edu>. For information on conference sponsorship or being an exhibitor, contact Bob Hochmuth, 386-362-1725 or bobhoch@ufl.edu.