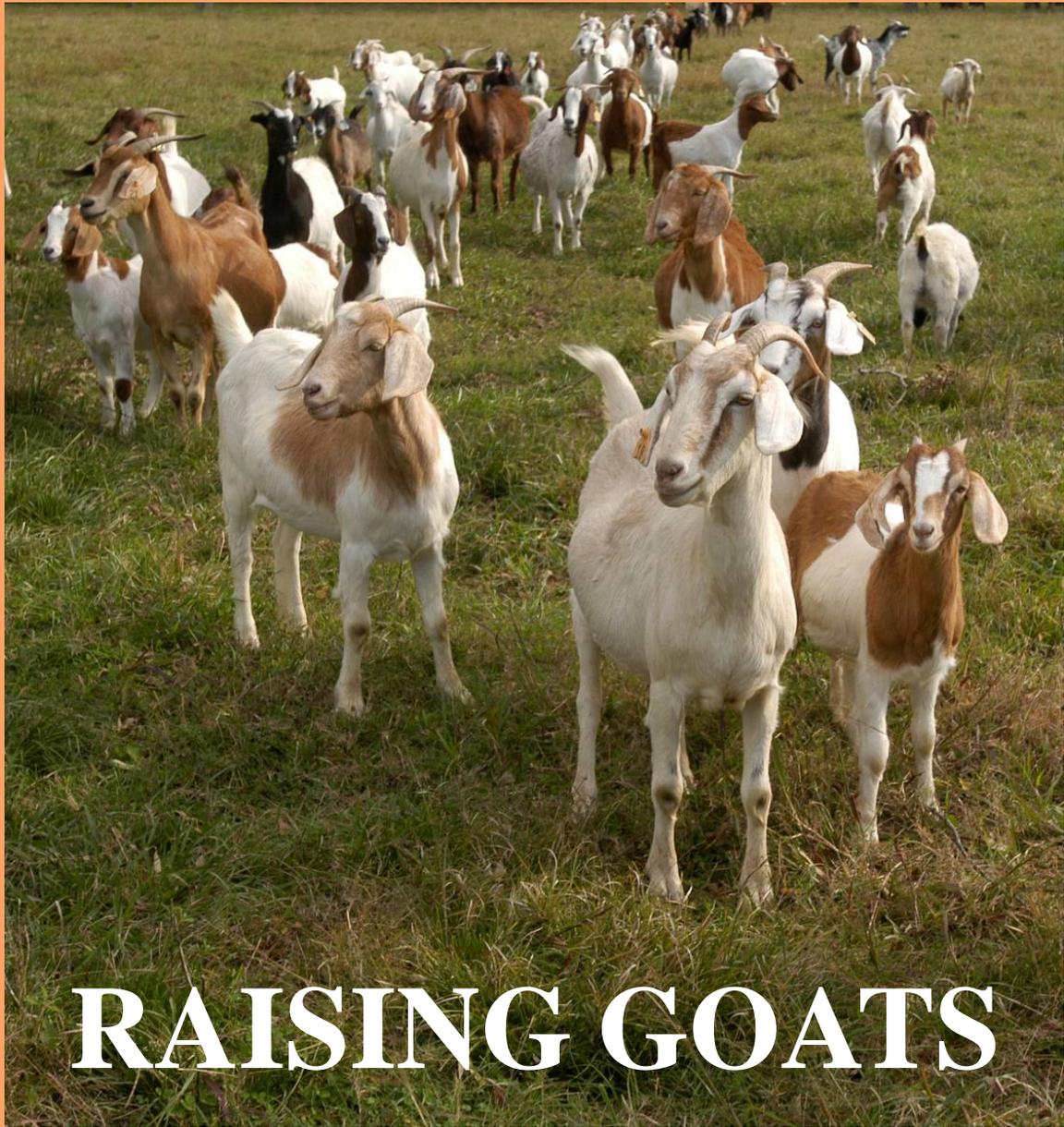


# SMALL FARM *digest*

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## RAISING GOATS

# "The Goat Man"

Desmond Reid has been raising meat goats for over 10 years. Town-raised in the West Indies, he always wanted to live in the country and finally, after long service in the banking industry, he was able to follow his heart and buy some land in rural Maryland.

Although the greater Washington area has been creeping closer and closer since Mr. Reid moved to his farm, the setting is so tranquil it is hard to imagine that shopping malls and urban sprawl are fairly close by. No doubt the property will one day be in great demand for development, but he is determined to preserve the rural quality of his land.

Most of the farm and his efforts are devoted to goat production, with the help of 4 large, handsome Pyrenean Mountain Dogs who protect the herd. Mr. Reid also runs a few hair sheep but prefers his goats - "sheep are not too bright" - and for a hobby he keeps a variety of pheasants, guineas, regular farmyard chickens, and beautiful fantailed pigeons.

Mr. Reid started his goat farm pretty much from scratch. He worked hard and sank a lot of his resources into essential facilities such as electric fencing, birthing sheds for the kids, and a breeding program to improve the quality of the herd. He also put a lot of effort, especially in the early years, into learning all he could about the rearing and marketing of meat goats. Advice came from many sources: talking to other farmers, enrolling in classes, local Cooperative

Extension staff and publications; and he found information from the University of Guelph to be particularly useful. More recently he relies on information from Virginia Tech and the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore.

And his efforts paid off - perhaps more than he bargained for! In remarkably few years he was running over 500 goats on his property and had become known in the local area as "the Goat Man."

While not strictly organic, his goats are reared as naturally and healthily as possible. They spend most of the year outside, grazing in a sequence of pastures during the growing season, and feeding mostly on hay grown and baled on the farm during the winter months.

Despite the hardiness and soundness of his goats, tending them is still a time-consuming business. Mr. Reid points out that the climate and topography of the farm are not ideal. Goats do best in drier, more rocky and hilly

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areas and Maryland's high humidity and his farm's flat terrain encourage some health issues. Hoof Rot and intestinal worms are the main problems, and both can seriously debilitate an animal and reduce its production value. While treatment of these diseases is fairly easy and not too expensive, it is very labor intensive and the problem always recurs.

Another recurring, time consuming job is trimming hooves. Goats are browsers, rather than grazers, and the soft, flat pastureland doesn't wear down their hooves naturally.

Mr. Reid, therefore, pays very close attention to his herd, identifying and treating problems before they spread too far throughout the herd, and he certainly knows his goats individually.

[Note: while goat farming is not new to the region, health services are not readily available. For example, there is a need for relatively inexpensive worm treatment specifically targeting goats; and few veterinarians have much experience in treating goats.]



In summary, Mr. Reid finds meat goats to be a challenging and rewarding enterprise. It's not difficult to keep a good sized herd, but the animals need considerable, hands on attention. Asked about just how much work is involved, he estimated that caring for up to 50 goats would be a full time job for one woman<sup>1</sup>. And he warned that reliable help is not always available, and often expensive, cutting into profits. Therefore, before setting up in goat farming, it is important to know the market.

The Goat Man's farm is ideally situated to tap into strong markets in Maryland, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Mr. Reid was fortunate in that he moved into the business soon after the North East U.S. market began to grow. His view is that goat meat was a market waiting to happen. Although earlier generations of immigrants no doubt preferred to eat goat meat, very little of it was produced locally. In the last 10 - 15 years, supply and demand began to increase together and today increasing numbers of customers from Latin America, the West Indies, various African countries, Greece, and the Middle East are anxious to buy his animals. He has no problem selling every goat he raises by word of mouth alone, and has never needed advertised (Well, he admits that he ran a little add in his daughters' high school paper once, but that didn't work)

Regulations do not allow Mr. Reid to slaughter and sell goat meat himself, but many of his customers prefer it that way, picking the animal they want and either taking it away for slaughter or slaughtering it on the farm them-

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Many factors affect how many goats one person can raise. 50 is at the low end of the range but it is advisable to look carefully at the type of operation planned, e.g. intensive *versus* extensive production,, and availability of affordable help during peak labor demands such as kidding.

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selves. Often whole families will come to buy and slaughter the animal as part of a major family celebration. In other cases, people buy their goats and take them to a butcher for slaughter, often for the specific Halal requirements.

Lack of nearby slaughtering facilities is the major limiting factor for this farm. The nearest facility is in Westminster, Maryland, and transporting his animals there eats into Mr. Reid's profits.

Considerable wastage is another slaughtering issue. Standard US procedures normally use less than 50% of an animal but most meat goat buyers find a use for almost all of the animal; very little is wasted.

Mr. Reid would like to establish his own, USDA approved and inspected slaughtering facility, and finds it frustrating that local zoning laws do not permit this. With such a facility it would be worth his while financially to run many more goats on his land, and

even buy goats from others for slaughter and sale. He could expand his marketing, for example to local stores. But without such a facility, he cannot increase his operation beyond on-farm sales. He can sell individually as many as he can grow, but cannot scale up his operation as several states do in the south.

This is particularly the case in Texas where land is cheaper, and humidity and flatland ailments are less frequent and less expensive to treat. Texas meat goat farmers can afford to run large herds and slaughter and sell many more animals, getting the benefits of economies of scale in production, transportation and marketing.

**What is the future of the market? Mr. Reid believes it will continue to rise, in the North East and across the U.S. as more people arrive from countries where goat is the meat of choice, and as health-conscious Americans learn just how healthy - and tasty - goat meat is**



# Can You Make Money from Goats?

Goat farmers in the United States have long tapped into a fairly small but steady market for goat meat, goat milk and milk products, and goat fiber. The relative importance of these products has often varied, but demand for goat meat has risen sharply in the past 20 years, and many people are now very interested in rearing goats as an alternative enterprise. It is important to understand this market opportunity, however, before making any commitments. Will demand for goat meat continue to rise? How difficult is marketing? And, how likely is it that you will be able to carve out a major financial empire from your goats?

## Overview of the numbers

Despite their increasing popularity, goats are still only a small fraction of all farm animals in the United States. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service Inventory in early 2007, there are [61.1 million](#) hogs and pigs, and [97 million](#) cattle and calves, but only [2.93 million](#) goats. It is unlikely, therefore, that goats could ever rival cattle or hogs in the U.S. market, but they may replace sheep and lamb. The numbers for sheep and lamb have generally declined since World War II, and have fallen from less than 12 million in early 90's to 6.19 million in 2007. About 82 percent of goats (2.4 million of the 2.93 million) fall into the 'meat and other'



goats category <sup>1</sup>, milk goats come second with 296,000 head, and fiber goats are third with 238,000 Angoras.

## Goat milk and milk products

Milk goats are raised in nearly every state in the United States. Wisconsin leads with 33,000 head, and Texas and California each have 30,000. The market for goat milk, though low, is growing slowly. Goat milk compares very favorably to cow's milk in nutritional content, with the added bonus of being palatable to many who are lactose intolerant. Goat milk producers often face difficult regulatory hurdles, however, with most states banning sales of raw milk. Aged cheese products have fewer restrictions, and goat cheese is gaining in popularity. This can be a profitable venture, especially in high-end markets, as any trip to the supermarket shows, but production

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<sup>1</sup> The catchall 'other goats' makes up less than 1 percent of this category and includes animals raised for breeding or show purposes, or for pets.

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techniques can be tricky and expensive. (It takes a lot of goats to produce a saleable volume of cheese!)

Another and growing value-added alternative is the use of goat milk in skin care products. For example, a [Small Business Innovation Research](#) grant is supporting a group of Illinois and Wisconsin dairy goat producers who are testing marketing strategies and income potential for items such as milled goat milk soap.

### Angora goats for mohair

Fiber goats are raised mostly for an export market, and the United States is perhaps the second largest producer of mohair in the world. The price for angora goats is generally low, restricting profitable production to low value, semi-arid land in the Southwest where they can be reared most cheaply. Texas is, by far, the largest producer with 180,000 head; another 18,000 are raised in Arizona, and 7,000 in New Mexico. Recent price increases may trigger a modest resurgence in the market.



### Growth of the meat goat industry

The U.S. meat goat industry has expanded dramatically over the past 25 years<sup>2</sup>. In 1981, for example, only 62,000 meat goats were slaughtered in federally inspected facilities; this number rose to 350,000 by 1994, and in 2002 it was up to more than 500,000 head! Looking at sales, Census of Agriculture data show that the number of meat goats sold rose from more than 500,000 to more than 1.1 million between 1997 and 2002. In total numbers of animals, the inventory of more than 1.9 million head to 2.4 million between 2002 and 2006. Import-export data make it clear that this growth in domestic demand caused expansion of the industry. Until 1990, the United States was a net exporter of goat meat; by 1994, exports had all but ceased, and, between 1999 and 2003, goat meat imports increased 151 percent.

It is interesting to speculate on what caused this surge in demand for goat meat in the early 1990's. A major factor, no doubt, was the growth of sub-populations with a tradition of eating goat meat. Goat is the most popular meat in the world, and between 1990 and 2000, the U.S. foreign-born population rose 57 percent. As Pinkerton<sup>3</sup> notes, immigration averaged 61,150 per month between 1985 and 1995.

The 1993–95 phase-out of the Wool Act of 1954 may also have stimulated the demand for goat meat. This act had supported production of sheep but

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these numbers, please refer to "[Assessment of the Current Meat Goat Industry and future Outlook for U.S. Small Farms](#)". Dr. S. Solaiman, Tuskegee University.

<sup>3</sup> [Meat Goat Marketing in Greater New York City](#), F. Pinkerton.



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also Angora goat for decades. The sheep were grown primarily for wool, but some were also sold for meat. The loss of price support may have reduced this supply, thereby increasing the price of lamb and mutton to a level that made goat meat much more popular with consumers. Note the sudden rise in the number of meat goats slaughtered through federally inspected sites in 1993.

The supply of affordable goat meat was also encouraged by the importation of Boer goats from South Africa in the early 1990s. Larger, meatier, and harder than indigenous breeds, these animals soon became extremely popular (at that time a Boer goat could sell for \$1,000!) and today most meat goats are either purebred Boer goat or Boer goat cross.

### **Future demand and supply**

Export data confirm that, despite a significant increase in production over the past few years, demand far outstrips the domestic supply of goat meat. And this demand is likely to continue, fueled largely by immigration and growth of sub-populations from traditionally goat-eating countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America.

Traditionally, most goat meat was consumed in the Northeast, with a smaller market in the Southwest. While demand is still greatest in these areas, the spread of immigrant populations has created new markets. A recent report by Dr. Terry Gipson, of Langston University, traces ethnic populations, immigration patterns, and the physical disconnection between producers and consumers.

Texas dominates the market as the main producer of meat goats with an inventory of 1.09 million head of the total 2.4 million. However, raising meat goats is becoming increasingly popular in other states, particularly in the South. Tennessee has 117,000 head – an increase of nearly 14 percent from the 2006 inventory; California has 100,000; and Georgia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Missouri each have more than 60,000. Several states have produced economic analyses of the impact of the industry (e.g., the [Outlook for a Small Farm Meat Goat Industry in California](#) and the [Economic Impact of Goat and Sheep Production in Georgia](#)).

### **Profitability of meat goats**

Given the growing demand, it is no wonder that more and more people are turning to meat goats as a 'sure-fire' alternative farming enterprise. But, this is not the whole story. High demand does not necessarily mean you can sell your goats at large profit.

One issue, of course, is the cost of production. Before investing, it is a good idea to investigate how expensive a meat goat operation is likely to be. It is no accident that Texas is the

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largest goat producing state, although its main markets are thousands of miles away. It owes this predominance largely to the Edwards Plateau, a semi-arid, rocky area, covered with live oak, that provides an excellent habitat for goats – but not much else. In other words, production costs in Texas are low enough to sell goats competitively in the big Northeastern market, despite the transportation costs.

Resources on the costs of goat production include [Marketing Meat Goats](#) and the [Feasibility of Meat Goats in Minnesota](#). In addition, local [Cooperative Extension offices](#) are always good places to begin enquiries into the feasibility of raising meat goats profitably. Before starting a meat goat operation, it is also important to consider marketing: what kinds of markets are available, whether you are comfortable with their approach, and how much you are likely to get for your animals.

There are many formal markets across the country where wholesalers buy the goats live, and then transport them for slaughter and resale in urban markets. [Goat Rancher](#) magazine has current information on sales at these markets. While formal markets help farmers raise and sell large numbers of animals, lack of uniform quality standards for live goats and for carcasses decreases the reliability and efficiency of the markets, and the price to the farmer is often rather low.

Another marketing option is to sell on-farm to local buyers. Unlike other livestock, many meat goats are slaughtered privately rather than through

federally inspected systems.<sup>4</sup> There are no good data on the numbers sold but an interesting article on [the meat goat industry](#), by Keithly Jones (USDA's Economic Research Service) reports a rough estimate of 150,000 animals in 2002. Marketing costs are very low with on-farm sales, farmers generally reporting that they can sell all the animals they rear by word-of-mouth. A downside, however, is that total sales are low, with most buyers looking for one or very few animals. Also, buyers arrive at any time, and often prefer to slaughter the animal on-site. Not all farmers are comfortable with this option.

Web-based marketing approaches are becoming a popular way to connect goat farmers to potential buyers. The [Buckeye Meat Goat Marketing Alliance](#), for example, is "designed to promote marketing, enhance profitability, and increase access to emerging markets for goat meat." Similarly, the [Northeast Sheep & Goat Marketing Project](#) promotes a stronger marketing infrastructure for producers in the Northeastern states. Marketing alliances help small producers work together to achieve economies of scale, for example by establishing local collection points, reducing transportation costs. Another advantage is that these alliances generally provide educational information to producers.

**The popularity of raising goats for profit is on the rise, and can definitely pay dividends, but it's not for everyone. Be sure to investigate all the facts – the animal, the products, the logistics, the market, and where to get information and support – before jumping in.**

<sup>4</sup> The law allows individuals to buy slaughter animals for private use, or take them to a butcher for private slaughtering. Moslem dietary laws require strict slaughtering procedures.



# Resources

## [Alabama Cooperative Extension Publications](#)

[Assessment of the Current Meat Goat Industry in the United States](#):  
4<sup>th</sup> National Small Farm Conference, CSREES\USDA, pp 179—185

[E \(Kika\) de la Garza Institute for Goat Research](#): Langston University

[eXtension](#): valuable on-line resource for farmers, ranchers and rural entrepreneurs

[Goat Newsletter](#): University of Kentucky

[Goats: Sustainable Production Overview](#); and [Great Grazing with Sheep and Goats](#): ATTRA  
News: National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

[Marketing Meat Goats](#): The Pennsylvania State University

[Maryland Small Ruminant Page](#) : Susan Schoenian, Maryland Cooperative Extension.

[Meat Goats: A Growing Industry](#): Economic Research Service /USDA

[Meat Goats](#): Minnesota Department of Agriculture

[Meat Goats](#): North Carolina State University

[Small Ruminant Resources](#): National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

[Southwest Florida Research and Education Center](#): University of Florida

[Statewide Goat Program](#): Florida A&M University

“Testing Profitable Forage Systems for Goats” by Valerie Berton; *Minority Landowner*, vol  
1, no.4, Fall 2006. For a copy of the article: 919/215-1632; [ccpublishing@earthink.net](mailto:ccpublishing@earthink.net)

[The Buckeye Meatgoat Marketing Alliance](#)

[The Goat Dairy Library](#)

[Using the Web to Connect Buyers and Sellers of Small Ruminants](#): 4<sup>th</sup> National Small Farm  
Conference, CSREES\USDA, pp 106—108



# Upcoming Events

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
<b>2007</b>		
September 20	<a href="#">10th Anniversary Celebration of the "The Third Thursday Thing" and Small Farm Field Day</a> Contact: marion.simon@kysu.edu, 502-597-6437	Frankfort, KY
September 21-23	<a href="#">Common Ground Country Fair</a>	Unity, ME
October 2 – 3	<a href="#">CSREES Grantsmanship Workshop</a>	Denver, CO
October 9—10	<a href="#">CSREES Grantsmanship Workshop</a>	Washington, DC
October 13-14	<a href="#">Northeast Small Farm &amp; Rural Living Expo</a>	New Paltz, NY
November 14-16	<a href="#">The Small, Limited-Resource/Minority Farmers Conference</a> Contact: louie.rivers@kysu.edu ; 502-597-6327	Frankfort, KY
December 2-4	<a href="#">65th Professional Agricultural Workers Conference</a>	Tuskegee, AL
<b>2008</b>		
March 25-27	“ <a href="#">The New American Farm</a> ” The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program 20th Anniversary Conference. NOTE: the photo competition (submission deadline October 31st, 2007)	Kansas City, MO
October 12-15	National Goat Conference; Contact : 850-875-8557	Tallahasee, FL

## Opportunities

[Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education](#) (SARE), Call for proposals: Producer Grant Program and On-Farm Research Grant will be posted in September, 2007; Sustainable Community Innovation Grant - released. Deadline October 1st 2007.

[North Central SARE Program](#) 2007 Farmer Rancher Grant Program. Call for Proposals is now online. The deadline is 4:40pm, December 3, 2007

“[Successful Small Farming Series](#)”, Organic Sustainable Agriculture Land Trust, Oregon, September 29—December 1, 2007

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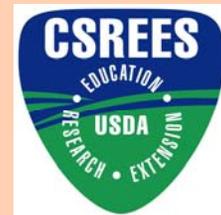
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All photos are courtesy of CSREES

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See the Small Farm website ([www.csrees.usda.gov/smallfarms](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/smallfarms)) for the most up-to-date listing of events. We welcome submissions of events from our subscribers that would be of interest to the small farms community so that our Upcoming Events listing reflects a diversity of events from all regions of the country.

If you have questions about the Small Farms Digest, to send submissions, or to subscribe or unsubscribe to this newsletter, please contact Patricia McAleer at (202) 720-2635, or at [pmcaleer@csrees.usda.gov](mailto:pmcaleer@csrees.usda.gov).



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