



# **Meat Goats**

## **An Overview of Marketing, Demand and a Few Basics**

**Sharon Fox Gamble**  
**UF/IFAS**  
**Extension Agent, IV**

**Goats and sheep are among the oldest domesticated species. The meat goat industry is one of the fastest growing components of agriculture within the U.S. According the U.S.D.A. Agricultural Statistics Service, the overall goat population continues to increase annually throughout the U.S. While the wool sheep industry has seen a decline, there has been an increasing interest in the hair sheep (meat-type sheep).**

**While goats have been consumed worldwide, the genetics for thickly muscled, meat animals were relatively unavailable. In the early 1990's Boer Goats were imported. Today, genetics for Boer goats from South Africa, the Kiko, from New Zealand, the Spanish Meat Goat, Savannah and the Tennessee Woodenleg and Tennessee Meat Goats are available for producers.**

**Historical data series are not readily available on goat production, marketing and production. Information of consumption, product characteristics desired, the markets used by goat producers are not widely available nor is the relative importance of the markets or characteristics of the market. Little is known about the production problems experienced by producers and their relative importance on decision making process.**

**In the mid 1980's finding information regarding production and marketing was extremely difficult regarding goats, only slightly better for sheep. There are numerous goat breeds that are categorized by their capacity to produce fiber, milk or meat but little, if any research had been conducted relative to goats, let alone meat goats. In Florida, demand for goat meat was being realized but producers were limited to selling and consumers limited to buying the extra bucks or wethers resulting from the breeding of milking goats... an industry, in Florida, artificially depressed by milk marketing laws.**

**An eleven state region from Texas to North Carolina (TX, LA, OK, AR, MS, AL, FL, GA, TN, SC and NC) is the goat production area and accounts for 78% of all goat production and 81% of meat goat production in 1997. An interesting factor facilitating the expansion of the meat goat industry within the Southeast was the financial settlements resulting from class action lawsuits against the U.S. tobacco industry. As monies were designated to pursue alternative forms of agriculture production, basically tobacco fields were turned into goat grazing pastures in states such as Kentucky, the Carolinas, Virginia, and Tennessee. The economic benefits spread to adjoining states with producers offering quality brood stock for sale.**

**By 2008, the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service reported 3,150,000 meat goats in the U.S., and American producers unable to meet domestic demand. Australia was listed, by the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), as the prime exporter of goat meat into the U.S. market.**

**By 2009 a survey was conducted of Tennessee goat producers that defined the average meat goat producer as 55-65 years of age with less than ten years experience raising goats. Most lack a marketing plan and typically relied on live auctions to market animals. Meat goat production in the southern region increased by 59% from 1992-1997. Net imports of goat meat also increased during that period. Changes in goat production are thought to be related to increase in the segment of the population that has preferences for goat products. The implication of these statistics is an increase in goat meat demand. However, little research is available that explain the consumption demographics of goat meat, cut preferences**

**In 2011, much more information is available, along with credible research. Much of this resulted from the formation of various producer groups and organizations. Land Grant Universities in particular have taken the lead in providing educational information and programs. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System offers a broad spectrum of information online (aces.edu) and Florida A&M, Fort Valley State, Langston State and Penn State Universities are among many institutions that offer extensive information and programs addressing various aspects of goat production and much of the research funded by Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE).**

**Goat production offers a viable form of sustainable livestock production, particularly for individuals with limited financial resources, limited land availability and limited physical abilities. While the young and old tend to be easily intimidated by large animal production such as beef or dairy cattle and hogs, goats are not as intimidating because of their smaller body size and general handling qualities (pet status). Goats can also serve as an environmentally friendly form of vegetation control and can easily be integrated as an alternative form of livestock diversification. They do not compete for the same type vegetation as cattle, sheep or swine and tend to complement other forms of livestock production.**

**What is the market outlook?**

**Currently demand is double the domestic production, so there is ample room for expansion.**

**Who buys and eats goat meat? The peak consumer age is 55 -74 years old. Consumer preferences are deeply rooted in demographic, social and economic characteristics of populations. Demographically, Hispanics, Muslims and individuals of the Caribbean region. Twenty-five percent of Hispanics as compared to 12 percent of the general population consume goat meat. Of the non-goat meat consumers, 32 percent of Hispanics said they were willing to try it as compared to 30 percent of non-Hispanics. Men tend to eat goat meat more but more so seasonably. Women, who eat less, tend to eat it year round and they prefer it more “showcase” ready.**

**Those who consume goat and lamb tend to be immigrants from other countries where they traditionally eat these meats. Ethnic groups relocating to the U.S. with a preference for**

goat and lamb tend to come from (but are not limited to) Africa, the Caribbean, Mexico, Asia, Europe, and the Middle Eastern and Latin American countries. They also tend to settle in areas where others of the same ethnic backgrounds have settled. If a goat or sheep producer can identify locations where there is a concentration of similar ethnic populations, the farmer can make reasonable efforts to successfully market his or her product within these communities, however, the producer needs to understand consumer preferences.

**How are goats marketed through organized auctions? The Federal State Market News Service classifies market goats by weight as follows:**

**Kids**            20 - 40 #, 40 – 60#  
**Bucks/billies** 75 - 100 #, 100 – 150#, 150 – 300#  
**Does/nannies** 60 - 80 #, 80 - 100#, 100 - 120#  
**Yearlings**    20 - 40 #, 40 – 60#, 60 - 80#  
**Wethers**        20 - 40#, 40 - 60#, 60 – 80#

(wethers and yearlings, although classified are rarely available)

**When are the highest prices received for market meat goats and for which market class? Kids 20 – 40# and 40 – 60 # by order of highest prices received:**

1. April
2. March
3. February
4. May
5. June
6. July

How was this determined? The Federal State Market News Service in Tifton, Ga., over a 21 month period, tracked 72 sales events with over 24, 471 animals being sold. Most of the animals were sold during the spring and summer months. Prices received varied from Kids 20- 40# selling for \$35.72 per head to Bucks/Billies at \$110.12. The Kids classification has the lowest price variability. Billies/Bucks and Nannies/Does are not typically marketed as “slaughter class.” Most males are marketed intact as they are marketed before the secondary sex characteristics emerge and castration leads to slowed weight gains.

**What are the religious holidays\*?**

<b>Christian Holidays</b>	<b>Jewish Holidays</b>	<b>Islamic Holidays</b>	<b>Hindu Holidays</b>
<b>Epiphany</b>	<b>Passover/Pesach</b>	<b>Start of Ramadan</b>	<b>Navadurgara or Navratra Dasshara or Dassai</b>
<b>Western or Roman Easter</b>	<b>Rosh Hashanah</b>	<b>Eid ul-Fitr</b>	<b>Diwali</b>
<b>Eastern or Greek Easter</b>	<b>Chanukah</b>	<b>Eid ul-Adha</b>	
<b>Christmas</b>		<b>Muharram/Islamic New Year</b>	

		<b>Mawlid al-Nabi</b>	
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**\*Holiday dates change annually – producers need to know when these dates occur annually to match marketing with demand.**

<b>Ethnic Holidays and the Size of Kid Preferred for Feast</b>	
<b>Holiday</b>	<b>Size of Kid</b>
<b>Easter (Western)</b>	<b>20 – 50 pounds</b>
<b>Easter (Eastern and Greek)</b>	<b>20 – 50 pounds</b>
<b>Independence Day</b>	<b>20 – 35 pounds (older kids also accepted)</b>
<b>Caribbean holidays</b>	<b>60 pound bucks</b>
<b>Start of Ramadan (Muslim)</b>	<b>45 – 120 pounds, less than 12 months</b>
<b>Eid al Fitr (Muslim)</b>	<b>45 – 120 pounds, 60 pounds optimum</b>
<b>Eid al Adha (Muslim)</b>	<b>Yearlings, blemish free</b>
<b>Source: <a href="http://sheepgoatmarketing.info/education/ethnicholidays.htm">http://sheepgoatmarketing.info/education/ethnicholidays.htm</a></b>	

**Seasonal preferences currently exist. This may be in part to lack of overall availability however religious holidays are not the only events when goat or lamb is served. Ethnic groups may roast a goat or lamb during American holidays, such as Christmas, New Year’s, Memorial Day, July 4, and Labor Day. It is not unusual to serve goat or lamb at birthday parties, weddings, baptisms, graduations, anniversaries, and other celebration where family and friends gather.**

**What are the most popular breeds to produce? 70 percent of meat goat owners produce Boer goats while 43percent has Spanish and 15percent have Kiko goats. Eighty percent of producers with less than five years experience expected to increase their operations and 90 percent of producers with more than 100 animals and five years experience anticipated expansion.**

**What are the top five marketing practices? As listed by producers in order of decreasing importance:**

- 1. Visitors to the farm (44%)**
- 2. Goat auctions (42%)**
- 3. Breeding and stock sales (39%)**
- 4. Livestock auctions (32%)**

**What are the obstacles? In order of decreasing importance as listed by producers:**

- 1. Parasite**
- 2. Marketing**
- 3. Feeding practices**
- 4. Prices received**

**What are consumer preferences for live goat sales?**

- 1. Do the customers prefer male or female goats?**

2. If male, do they prefer intact or castrated males?
3. What goat or sheep age do the customers prefer?
4. Does this group prefer a small or large goat?
5. Do the customers prefer a live animal or an animal processed in a particular fashion? When or where do they prefer the animal to be processed?

What are the consumer preferences for retail sales? In descending order of importance:

1. Safety assurance
2. Freshness
3. Bright color

The consumer preference is most influenced by gender. Females and smaller households demand higher quality assurances of goat meat products. Consumer concern with cholesterol content is high and most notably with consumers with higher incomes and educational attainment as well as with older consumers. Goats produce a 10-20% more lean carcass than beef or lamb which should eventually result in overall increased consumer demand.

Willingness to consume more goat meat was reported by more than 48% of respondents. Blacks and multi-culture households are much more likely to increase consumption compared to others. Value added activities such as prepacked products, labeling, and cooking instructions are factors that are expected to influence increases in consumption. Increases in demand from new consumers are likely to be influenced by store displays, price specials, in-supermarket tests and USDA inspections.

### **Meat Goat Basics**

Fencing needs to be “right” goats are wonderful escape artists. Cattle fences may be adapted for goats by adding strands of barbed wire and stays or by installing offset hot wires inside the fence about 8” high and 6 – 8” away from the fence. Goats must be trained to electric fence and charges should be maintained at a minimum of 4,000 volts. Eight strands of tight barbed wire or five strands of high-tensile electric or woven wire 47” high (topped with barbed wire and with another barbed wire at ground level will make a good fence).

### **Housing, Pens and Chutes**

Housing needs are minimal and in moderate climates consist of natural cover of thick trees and brush. Goats need protection from rain and cold wind and snow. While snow isn’t a concern in Florida, rain certainly is. A sturdy shed, opened to the south will do. Know that goats love to climb on things and will. Keep this in mind when designing housing. Movable sheds (on skids) can provide many options. Allow 5 square feet per goat. If the shed is near the farmhouse, predators may be deterred.

Working chute should be about 10 feet long, 4 feet high and 12 inches wide. Longer chutes tend to cause crowding and trampling at the forward end and should be divided into section with sliding gates. Goats with horns will work through chutes better if side walls are solid and sloped. Well design working facilities enhance the safety and well being of animal and human. For more information please consult Meat Goat Production and

**Marketing Handbook, North Carolina by Gipson, T. and Housing, Fencing, Working Facilities and Predators by Harwell, L. and Pinkerton.**

### **Multi-species Grazing**

**Goats make a valuable contribution to maintain the productivity of pastures they graze, particularly when used in a multi-species grazing scheme. Many cattle producers have found that adding goats to their farm or ranch increased profits while improving pasture. Goat Specialist, Jean-Marie Luginbuhl of NC State believes you can add one or two goats per head of cattle without reducing beef production. Goats and cattle do not share the same parasites and goats consume plants that cattle avoid, thereby increasing grass production for cattle as the suppression of brush allows more grass growth.**

### **Stocking Rate**

**It is generally believed that six mature goats equal one cow on improved pasture and that 10 goats equal one cow on browse. When grazing brush, it may be necessary to adjust stocking rate in order to accomplish objectives. These figures depend on the carrying capacity of the land and observation and adjustment are necessary.**

### **Conclusion**

**The meat goat industry is located in the southern states. Demand currently outstrips production. Information is much more readily available than what was 20 years ago. The Federal State Market News Service has recognized the increased sales and developed marketing classifications. More is known, but more needs to be determined regarding consumer preferences and demographics.**

**Future trends indicate that a consumer market will need to be more fully developed. As immigrants and their offspring become more “Americanized” goat products will need to more meat-case ready. Additionally goat meat consumption will increasingly compete with beef, pork, and poultry. Consumers may embrace goat meat more readily if more knowledgeable regarding the health aspects.**

**The U.S. Census Bureau confirms that continued growth of populations from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean in the U.S. NASS forecast a continued increase in demand for goat meat and a consecutive growth in meat goat production. These opportunities will necessitate those institutions, organizations, and leaders active within the meat goat industry to continue to hold a stake to ensure promotion and producer education as outreach efforts are continued and expanded as needs arise.**

### **References**

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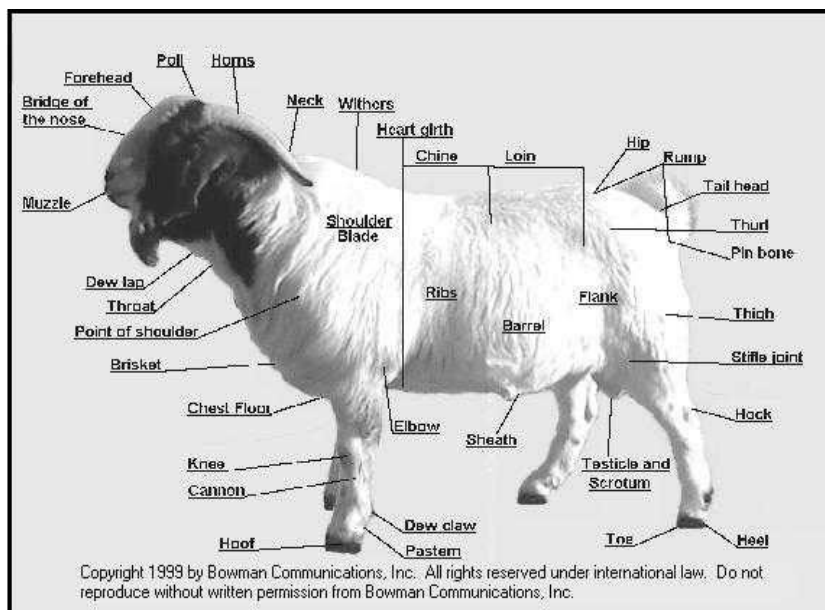
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### Further Information



<http://www.sheepandgoat.com/>

Florida Meat Goat Association

<http://www.fmga.org/>

Meat Sheep Alliance of Florida

<http://www.msasheep.com/>

ATTRA National Sustainable Agricultural Information Service

<http://attra.ncat.org/>

Maryland Small Ruminant Page

Southern Consortium for Small Ruminant For Parasite Control

<http://www.scsrpc.org/>