

## Meat and Dairy Goats in Cache County

Cache County, like other counties in the Western United States, is experiencing a major transition in land use. Though we still have a host of relatively large acreage, well managed crop and livestock farms, the number of smaller acreages is increasing. Small acreage owners often enjoy gardening, raising a beef steer, feeding a horse or two and continually attempting to control troublesome weeds.

In addition to the number of small acreages, there also appears to be a new interest in raising goats. Some are raised for meat, some for milk production, a few as hiking companions and pack animals, many as pets and others as a means of controlling weeds and grasses. There is evidence that goats are wonderful companion animals for nervous horses. The expanding Latino population also has a preference for goats. Perhaps more of us should consider the potential benefits of raising goats on our small acreages.

Besides sheep and dogs, the goat is thought to have been the earliest animal domesticated. Cave art 10,000 to 20,000 years ago indicates that goats were common and important. Today, goats provide the principal source of animal protein in many North African and Middle Eastern nations. They are also important in the Caribbean areas and in Southeast Asia. In addition to meat and milk, goats make important contributions to the world's supply of skins for specialty leather and mohair fiber. Statistics indicate that the United States imports about 40 million goat skins annually for shoes, gloves, pocketbooks, bookbinding, etc. The fine, long, silky hair from Angora and Cashmere goats is highly prized for clothing and other fabrics.

Goats are usually the most underrated of all domestic animals. They are often blamed for overgrazing, killing trees and shrubs and being a general nuisance wherever they are found. Without proper management and control these claims can be true, but the same is true for all grazing animals. Some people are prejudiced against goat's meat or milk, often without ever having tasted these foods. There also seems to be a social stigma against anyone who is associated with goats. Perhaps that stigma comes from the distinctive odor of active breeding male goats.

Goats have many advantages over other domestic animals. Goat's milk is more easily digested than cow's milk, with finer curd and smaller fat globules. Some children who cannot tolerate cow's milk often thrive on goat's milk. The same is true for baby calves and orphan colts. Goats consume a wide variety of grasses, weeds, leaves and small branches from bushes and trees that are otherwise wasted. Their smaller size permits them to be maintained on a limited area and they are usually gentle and easy to control. Their small size makes them suitable for home slaughter and their meat is often preferred by those who have actually eaten goat meat. Another advantage of goats is their ability to reproduce quickly because of early sexual maturity and the frequency of multiple births. The initial investment to start a goat herd is much less than for other livestock species.

All goat breeds can be consumed as meat, but the Boer breed is the most common and is raised specifically for that purpose. Their extreme muscling and rapid rate of gain make

them superior. Currently there is no established marketing or distribution system for goat meat. Therefore, market development is usually a case of individual entrepreneurship. As a result, prices may vary widely, but an increasing percentage of our local population has a preference for goat meat, especially for goats harvested as kids or yearlings. Goats, for example, are sold with increasing frequency at local livestock market outlets.

Saanen, Alpine, Toggenburg, LaMancha and Nubian are common breeds raised for milk production. The best milk producers have exceptional genetics and are fed and managed similar to high producing dairy cows. It is not uncommon for a well bred and well managed dairy goat to produce 4,000 pounds of milk during a single lactation. Most of the milk produced is consumed at home. Some goat dairies close to housing developments have become successful in building a jugging business which may include pasteurizing, processing and packaging fluid milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream. Most states require dairy goat milk producers to meet the same quality standards required of dairy cow milk producers.

Some have suggested that Extension help organize a group of goat producers within the county. Other commodity groups meet on a regular basis, and if interest is high enough, goat producers can organize as well. Call the Extension office (752-6263) if you are interested.

Small and large acreage owners who need to diversify are invited to participate in the second annual Diversified Agriculture Conference February 24-26 in Brigham City. The conference will generate ideas and provide tools that will allow property owners to be competitive in the marketplace today and tomorrow. Discussions will address value-added agriculture including recreation, tourism, direct marketing, further processing and a multitude of additional details. More information is available at [www.DiverseAg.org](http://www.DiverseAg.org).