

THE

MEAT



GOAT

HANDBOOK



RAISING

GOATS

FOR **FOOD, PROFIT,** AND **FUN**



YVONNE ZWEEDE-TUCKER





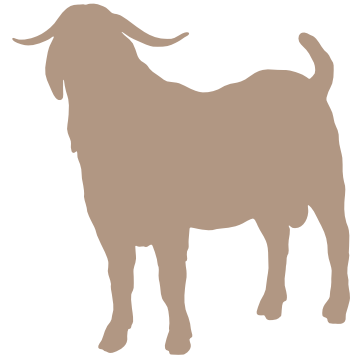


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INTRODUCTION

WHY MEAT GOATS?



Welcome to the wonderful world of meat goats! You're probably attracted to the idea of raising meat goats for a variety of reasons. Perhaps you're intrigued by their personalities—their intelligence and spontaneity makes them fun animals to raise. They almost seem to have a sense of humor, and as long as their basic needs are met, they enjoy life fully.

Maybe you're interested in raising meat goats because they're profitable. The United States and

Canada don't produce as much goat meat as consumers wish to purchase. Due to the scarcity of supply, the value of the meat continues to rise, making its production easier to carry out profitably. Many different cuisines use goat meat either as a staple for everyday meals or as a delicacy for holidays or special occasions. In fact, approximately 80 percent of the world's population consumes goat meat regularly, according to the University of California Cooperative Extension. Not only



The goat in world history

A magnificent ancient Byzantine mosaic of a shepherd milking a goat and another farmer coming to collect it in a large jar. From the remains of the great palace in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul, Turkey). *Shutterstock*

is the number of people who already prefer goat meat growing, but every day new consumers are discovering the delicious flavor and health benefits of *chevon* or *cabrito* (other names for goat meat).

You might be attracted to meat goats' manageability. Since they're relatively small animals, they can be raised on a reasonable scale (several goats on one or a few acres of land). Meat goats can't accidentally hurt you as easily as large animals can, and they can be well managed by a person working alone. Hardy and largely undemanding animals, meat goats are not only perfect homestead livestock, but can also be successfully managed in large numbers.

It could be that you're simply seeking a change of pace. Meat goats can be a rewarding first career, as well as a wonderful new career after retirement if you long to be outside and with animals. Opportunities abound in the meat goat industry, not only in animal production but in all facets of marketing, transportation, genetics, and management.

Whatever your reasons for wanting to raise meat goats, you'll find that they provide joy and comfort to all who own them. But don't just take it from me. Here's what other producers had to

say when I asked them why they started (and kept going) with meat goats:

- "I want to work outside with my daughters, learning together and creating something that our customers will be pleased to acquire or consume."
- "I hadn't realized how much we appreciate the intelligence and personality of goats. It makes raising them so much more fun than business just for the profit of it. So entertaining!"
- "Goats help with each of the things that I want to do in my life: improve the soil every year, have plenty of delicious and nutrient-dense food, be surrounded by cheerful beings, learn until the last moment of my life, and have enough money that I don't have to worry."
- "We do it because it makes our souls sing and our life worthwhile. We are not complete without the rhythm of life and the song of the seasons."

As you begin your journey with meat goats, you'll soon find that there is a lot that you want (and need) to learn about them. That's where *The Meat Goat Handbook* comes in.

THE MIND OF A GOAT

The domestic goat, which includes our beloved meat goats, has an extremely adaptable, clever, entertaining, fascinating (and occasionally exasperating!) mind. Adaptability is defined as being able to change to take advantage of the environment. When you consider all of the different farms and ranches across North America where meat goats are surviving and thriving, adaptability isn't just a description of the trait that helps them survive—it's a good description of how amazing these animals are. Some meat goats live happily in areas with very little annual rainfall and temperatures that frequently rise well above 100 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. Other meat goats live happily in areas with heavy annual rainfall and humidity, or in areas where over half the year is considered winter and temperatures plummet far below zero. I think that not only could goats well have coined the phrase "just deal with it," but also that they deal with life with an admirable amount of verve and spirit.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

If you're curious about, thinking about, or planning to start a meat goat enterprise, you probably have lots of questions: What kind of goats should you choose? How do you buy them and care for them? How do they reproduce? How do you sell them?

Having faced all of those questions and more, I've learned firsthand that there's usually more than one right answer. In *The Meat Goat Handbook*, I'll tell you what has worked for me and my husband and for other producers. I'll show you how to clarify your goals, whether they be chuckling many times per day or paying off your land. I'll explain the ins and outs of preparing for, acquiring, and caring for your goats, allowing you to hit the ground running rather than scrambling to catch up. I'll also offer practical tips on a variety of related topics, from protecting your goats from predators to breeding and raising kids to understanding and managing your enterprise, even if it's for pleasure. *The Meat Goat Handbook* isn't breed specific; it's success specific!

In the Resources section at the end of this book, I've included a list of useful periodicals, books, and websites to help you get started in your meat

goat enterprise. Following the Resources section is the Glossary, one of my favorite parts of the book (after all the beautiful pictures graciously shared by so many in the industry). In it you'll find definitions for the most common words used in the meat goat industry. The first time a Glossary word is used in the book, it will be bolded (see, you were probably wondering why a word was bolded earlier). There also are handy management tips and information incorporated into the Glossary.

Why do I use the word "enterprise" rather than "job" or "business" when I refer to meat goats? Because I don't think you should call something that's this fun a job, even if you're earning money from it. Because for most of us, the word "business" has many deep-rooted overtones, of which humor isn't one. And because the dictionary says that enterprise is "readiness to embark on bold new ventures" and "a purposeful or industrious undertaking, especially one that requires effort or boldness." I believe that if you're bold and ready to take on a new challenge with meat goats, *The Meat Goat Handbook* will be an invaluable guide.

Please enjoy *The Meat Goat Handbook*!

The Meat Goat Handbook—one of the best illustrated, well-written, and easy-to-read books on meat goat production—comes from a highly experienced "goat lady" who has not only been raising and breeding goats for 20 years but mentoring and helping new goat producers as well. The book has a wealth of management and economic information as well as outside-the-box, challenging ideas that will be valuable to more-experienced producers. It is the only goat book written from the standpoint of having a profitable commercial meat goat enterprise. If you are a goat producer—whether new, wannabe, or experienced—this is the best book for learning about meat goat production.

Dr. Steve Hart
Goat Extension Specialist
Langston, Oklahoma

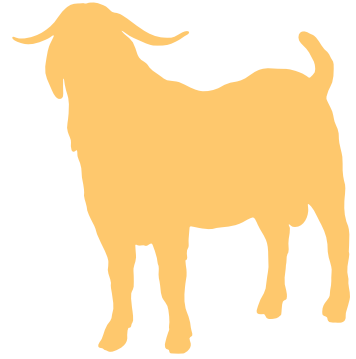


The goat in history right here in America

Petroglyphs of what could be goats adorn the canyon walls in Utah's Capitol Reef National Park, chipped into the stone over a thousand years ago by the Fremont people. *Petroglyphtrail*

CHAPTER 1

ESTABLISHING GOALS



What do you want out of your meat goat enterprise? You probably want to be successful, satisfied, and proud of what you do in the world of meat goats.

What is success? You get to decide what success is for you: whether you want to make money with your goats, have fun, save your corner of the world from invasive plants, protect a rare or endangered breed, help your children learn how to care for livestock, produce healthy and delicious meat, or a combination of all of

those. Whatever your goal, you get to decide what you want to do and how.

How do you set yourself up for success? I suggest deciding on your main goal in raising meat goats, then decide if there is anything else that you really want to get out of your goat enterprise. Be honest with yourself and the people who are important to you about what is most important, then what's second, then what's third. Perhaps you want your goat enterprise to break even or your goat kids to grow to a certain size by a certain age (measured in months or even days). Or perhaps your goal is to have your goats raise the most salable pounds of market kids per pound of **doe** per acre of land per year. You'll soon find that if you make dramatic progress toward one goal, there is usually a cost in progress toward another goal. Taking short-term profit (for example, by selling your does or doe kids as market goats for



The Boer goat has become the standard in market meat goats. Producers can select for the attributes that make a goat perfect for their environment and management system. *Lynn Stone*

No matter what your financial goal is, knowing how your revenues and costs compare to each other, and why, is extremely important to overall satisfaction with your goat enterprise.



When one goat comes running to greet you, usually they all do. Herd instinct makes meat goats want to stay together.
Bryce Gromley for Gromley Farms

meat) will make it impossible for you to have kids born from those goats in the future. Also, doe kids raised at faster rates of weight gain typically don't have the same fertility as goats with a more moderate rate of growth. That's why it's important to prioritize your goals and be realistic about achieving one at a time.

No matter what you want to achieve, stay focused on that, and judge every opportunity to spend or make money on whether it will get you closer to your goal(s). Pretend that you have a yardstick to hold up against things and see if they measure up so that you can move closer to your target. It's better in the long run to pass up an opportunity than to regret having gotten overwhelmed or stuck.

So what are some goals that you can achieve with meat goats?



Meat goats are more than happy to consume unwanted vegetation that few other animals will eat, such as these honey locust trees. *Jean-Marie Luginbuhl, North Carolina State University*

ECONOMIC PROFIT

You goal may be (1) to have money left over after you pay all your goat bills, (2) to break even by spending as much money as your goats bring in, or (3) to lose the least amount of money possible with your goat enterprise. No matter what your financial goal is, knowing how your revenues and costs compare to each other, and why, is extremely important to overall satisfaction with your goat enterprise.

There are many opportunities for people in the meat goat industry. Raising market goats, raising goats for breeding stock, having goats do forage-management projects, working as an organizer to match goats from different producers to the needs of different customers, or designing websites or advertising programs are all ways that you can match your unique talents to the needs of the growing world of meat goats. The easiest way to have money left at the end of each year is to spend just a few minutes planning before you buy your first goats, and checking on your progress a few times per year. A startup financial worksheet is outlined in Chapter 11.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFIT

Goats have a wonderful advantage over many other domesticated forage-consuming animals

Goats have a wonderful advantage over many other domesticated forage-consuming animals in that they will search out, and devour with gusto and glee, plants that are usually thought of as a nuisance.

in that they will search out, and devour with gusto and glee, plants that are usually thought of as a nuisance. Goats adore (and most farmers and ranchers have no love for) wild roses, kudzu, thistles, poison ivy and oak, leafy spurge, spotted knapweed, shrubby cinquefoil, yellow star thistle, buttercups, oxeye daisies, houndstongue, osage orange, and honey locust.

Meat goats will consume these undesired plants and turn them into a red meat that is in short supply and in growing demand. Some

MEAT GOATS AND STEWARDSHIP

Tom and Meta Syfan of Mountain Home, Texas, have been in the meat goat business since 1955. When complimented on how beautiful their ranch and animals look (the Syfans raise black Spanish goats, fine-wool sheep, and crossbred cattle), Tom smiled and said, "We only get to borrow the land and the animals while we're here. Stewardship is what we do with them while we have them borrowed." After two decades of raising meat goats, up until that moment I thought that I was getting somewhat knowledgeable about the goats. Tom's quiet statement made me see clearly that there was still so much to learn.



Meat goat producers can raise goat breeds such as this Savanna doe and her new kid. Savannas are one of the newest breeds to become available in the United States. *Priscilla Ireys, Critton Creek Farm*



Cashmere is one of the finest fibers available and is produced by a meat goat. Both cashmere and goat meat are in short supply in the United States. *Anne Marcom for Cozine Springs Ranch*

people even get paid to have their goats practice biological control of undesired species of plants. Others are carrying out land restoration by using goats to improve damaged land. Meat goats can assist land managers in achieving biodiversity—using different species of animals to harvest what nature produces rather than trying to make land produce what we want.

ENRICHING YOURSELF AND THE WORLD

You don't have to pick goals only for yourself when it comes to meat goats—the whole family can benefit from raising them. Meat goats are smart, funny, and affectionate and many will wag their tails when you pat them. Goats can give young members of a family livestock experience with animals that are a very manageable



Angora goats can be raised for the luxurious mohair fiber that they produce, in addition to being raised as meat animals. They must be shorn annually. *Karen Stieler*

size. Children can have goats for 4-H, learning about animal husbandry, record keeping, and showmanship.

Adults of all ages also can find satisfaction with meat goats. They can work on importing additional examples of a sought-after breed, protecting a rare or endangered breed, or producing more animals to feed consumers seeking goat meat for its delicious flavor and health benefits.

You can breed goats for a specific market, whether it be goats of a specific size, color pattern, fertility, longevity, or attitude (mild-mannered or tough enough to survive almost anything nature throws at them). Meat goats can produce cashmere, one of the world's finest and most luxurious fibers. Angora goats produce mohair, a lustrous specialty fiber.

Successful livestock management skills are not inherited, they are learned.

START SMART

Reaching your goals isn't difficult, if you know where you want to go and keep your attention on your progress. Setting up and operating a goat enterprise, whether you want to make money, have fun, or improve the world, can be a rewarding experience. Most advice will tell you to start small and let your herd size grow after you learn the ins



The Spanish landrace goat, once nearly lost to crossbreeding, is making a comeback due to the breed's hardy constitution and longevity. *Jeannette Beranger, American Livestock Breeds Conservancy*



Most goats love their people. Raising livestock is nice when you are appreciated and doing chores isn't a chore!
Liberty Pastures



This doe seems to be asking, "How much longer until kidding season?" She delivered triplets a few days after this photo was taken and raised them herself without any assistance.



Market goats wait in pens to be sold at a major livestock auction in Texas. The pens have roofs to shade the animals from direct sun. *Carol DeLobbe, Bon Joli Farm*

and out of raising and selling meat goats through “on the job” training. There is, in fact, no way to replace experience in learning how to do things right, but since my experiences with meat goats have almost all been good, I will be very honest with you and tell you what we would do differently if we were able to do it all over.

This book will help you to “start smart,” whether you want a small, medium, or large herd of goats. Successful livestock management skills are not inherited, they are learned. In *The Meat Goat Handbook*, you’ll read about the lessons that my husband and I have learned over many



Selling market kids is one possible source of income for your meat goat operation. Here, a small group of market kids is brought to a sale facility. *Carol DeLobbe, Bon Joli Farm*



A unique coat color pattern is attractive to some breeding stock buyers. Meat goats come in solid colors, two tone, "paints," and dapples, so there is a pattern for every customer's preference. *Carol DeLobbe, Bon Joli Farm*



Shrubby cinquefoil (*potentilla*) is a nuisance to cattle ranchers, as cows don't like it and thus it spreads across rangeland. However, meat goats will consume cinquefoil before they eat grass!

years, so that you know what to expect rather than getting any surprises on your journey. You already are well on your way to success: You have gotten this book and read this far and you're interested in or drawn to meat goats, which will make raising and selling goats fun. So keep up the good work!

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

There is no one right answer to the question of how many goats are right for your goat enterprise, what size goats are right for you, and what goals are right for you. So how do you decide what goals are right for you, choose the right goats to help you toward your goals, and determine how to evaluate your progress? It might seem boring, but moderation will get you to your destination. It's not as exciting and easy to brag about, but remember the story of the tortoise and the hare? Bankers and spouses are usually quite supportive of moderation too.

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

Success comes in many forms. Did one of your favorite goats finally have a female kid after previously only having males, so that soon you will be able to have that doe kid bred by a promising new **buck** that you just purchased? Has your county asked you to figure out how your goats could visit the hillside next to the city park and consume the Canada thistles that are growing there, as the hillside is too steep for human groundskeepers to tackle safely? Did a young person purchase a goat from you and then have fun showing it at the county fair? Because of the money that you have earned with the goats, do you have only a few years left on your land payment, or is the family farm once again profitable? Are you selling your market goats to an online store where people can buy cuts of *chevon* via the Internet? Any of these could be signs of success. It all depends on the goals you set for yourself and your goats.



Boer blood is evident in these meat goats, heading back out to pasture in Idaho after coming in to drink at their water trough. *Tangy and Matthew Bates, Blue Creek Livestock*



Goats and bushes are a great combination, according to the goat. Standing in knee-high grass, this young Spanish doe chooses to eat leaves rather than grass.



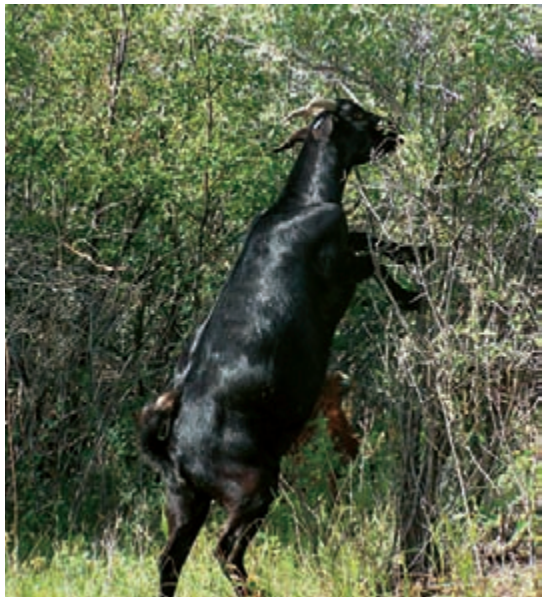
Meat goats to the rescue! This overgrown and unhealthy woodlot is being brought back to good health by a herd of hungry meat goats. Portable electric net fence concentrates the goats on the thick underbrush, and now they are mowing the grass near the trees. *Schneider Farms*



It almost looks like this goat kid is telling secrets to the child! Bottle baby goats offer unconditional love to their human foster parents. *Cori McKay for Smoke Ridge*

One thought that helps us with management and breeding decisions for our goats is to think about what animals we would like to see in our pastures in three, five, and ten years. As you read this book and the goat magazines, keep your eyes and mind open to what pictures make you think “wow.” If the sight of your goats running toward you makes you happy, that’s terrific. If the sight also makes you marvel at what amazing creatures they are, even better.

Our goat enterprise is profitable, which allows us to keep going, but more rewarding on a daily basis is the joy of renewal during each **kidding** season and pride in the goats that do well with their new kids, and the excitement when an animal is born that looks like what we have been trying to create by turning a specific buck in with a certain type or caliber of doe. Then customers call to find out when we will sell our market kids. Profit that lets us have pride in our animals and happy customers seems like a good cycle to me.



Goats will stand up on their back legs and harvest tree leaves as high as they can reach.



Excellent stewardship of the land and animals is evident on this West Texas Hill Country ranch. *Priscilla Ireys for Three Mill Ranch*

This could be someone's picture of the perfect place. A livestock guardian dog and her puppies enjoy a beautiful Canadian fall day guarding their caprine charges. *Pat Fuhr, Giant Stride Farm*





Conservation of a rare or endangered breed can be one of your goals in raising meat goats. This is a young female San Clemente Island goat, a critically endangered breed. *Carole Coates, Obsidian Ranch*

The Arapawa Island goat is a domestic goat that was once feral on an island near New Zealand. After hundreds of years of no interaction with humans, the critically endangered goats are now being conserved, and population numbers are growing slowly. *Jeannette Beranger, American Livestock Breeds Conservancy*





If it seems that this young South Carolina Island Spanish goat is smiling, it's because he and his herdmates have been moved to the mainland and no longer have to worry about alligators. *Jeannette Beranger, American Livestock Breeds Conservancy*

AN INDUSTRY OF OPPORTUNITY

The meat goat industry is unique, in that the demand for the product that we raise is purely based on consumer desire: There is year-round demand for fresh goat meat. The demand for *chevon* also doesn't require advertising, promotion, or free samples to maintain its growth.

Of course there are challenges in the market, but those offer incredible opportunities too. For example, a shortage of market goats in the winter causes prices to rise, while the ready supply of goats in the summer causes prices to fall. I see that as an opportunity to figure out how to have market goats available when the prices rise in the fall and winter. You can benefit from keeping your eyes open to new opportunities that align with your chosen goal(s).

Now that you've decided on a goal, whether it's helping the world or making some money, it's time to get ready for your meat goats. 🐐



Meat goats are very good listeners. They may not add much to the conversation, but it sure seems like they help you sort things out! *Beth Sladky for Hillcreek Farm*

THE PERFECT GOAT

The perfect goat is the one that does what you want or need it to do. This might be the biggest, meatiest goat that brings the best market price, or the landrace doe with the strong maternal instinct that produces three kids in one litter and raises them effortlessly and without assistance, or the 4-H meat goat project that won your daughter the blue ribbon at the state fair, or myriad other characteristics! The goats pictured on these pages all represent someone's idea of the perfect goat.



Loving doe and happy kid. *Horseshoe Canyon Ranch Meat Goats*



Red Boer buck. *Marge Newton, Newton Farms*



Child and goat both love to show. *4M Boer Goats*