



A Cattleman's Guide to Raising Meat Goats with Cattle

High prices for meat goats at markets around the country have created significant interest in goats. The demand for goat meat in the United States has far exceeded the supply for many years, resulting in strong markets, even with



competition from imports. This creates a unique opportunity for cattle producers to add meat goats to increase utilization of browse and weeds, resulting in increased revenue. The addition of meat goats will diversify the operation and spread financial risk.

Management

Although goats are generally one of the least labor-intensive livestock species, producers should prepare their operations for changes before adding goats. Advance planning for a multi-species operation will help accomplish a smooth transition.

Goats are small ruminants and some of their requirements differ from those of cattle. While cattle ranchers' skills and experience managing livestock and natural resources will be beneficial when adding goats

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to an operation, goat-specific management information will increase probability of success. Producers without livestock experience have a greater learning curve and are encouraged to utilize online courses prior to beginning their operation. Guidelines are available at: <https://AmericanGoatFederation.org/resources>.

Key considerations for managing goats on cattle operations:

- **Goats will travel further daily and require more secure fencing than cattle.**
- **Goats are more productive with a higher level of dietary browse and forbs than cattle.**
- **Goats require more predator control than cattle.**
- **Depending on where goats are sourced and the breed, they may require more parasite control.**
- **Newborn goat kids are more vulnerable to harsh weather than calves.**
- **Gestation period is in the range of 150 days and goat kids reach market weight faster than calves.**

Fencing

Woven wire field fence with 6 to 8 inch spacing is not recommended as goats can get their heads stuck. If this type of fencing is already in use, adding 1 or 2 offset hotwires may keep the goats in and their heads out of the fence.



In most cases, fence using three to six strands of barbed wire will not hold goats. Goats have thinner skin than cattle and are easily injured on barbs. Adding electric hot wire at 1 and 3 feet from ground level will hold goats and also help keep coyotes from digging under fence.



Forty-eight inch tall sheep/goat net wire can hold goats if it is stretched tight and placed close enough to the ground to prevent crawling under. For some breeds, adding 1 or 2 electric hot wires may be required.



Electrified netting works for small pasture/paddock high frequency rotations as it can be easily moved. This method may or may/not be used when running goats with cattle, depending on the operation.

In areas with heavy deer populations, 6 or 7 strand high tensile fence with 2 or 3 wires hot will keep goats in and is easy to repair. Another advantage to high tensile is that heads and horns will not get stuck.

Choosing fencing or adjusting existing fence to work with the location for a combined operation is critically important to success. For large open range operations, where fencing may not be possible, a full-time employee to herd the goats is an option. Most herded operations use the H2A Guest Worker program administered by the US Department of Labor.

Working Pens

Just as with cattle, using working pens can make handling goats safer and easier. A goat working pen needs a good sorting chute and a cutting gate. Having a small pen or drenching ally can also be beneficial. Several portable goat working systems are available that provide many options for sorting, vaccinating and tagging goats. Visit <https://americangoatfederation.org/resources> to view some of them.

Predators

Producers in areas that have coyotes, feral pigs, foxes, eagles, bears, mountain lions, domestic dogs and/or bobcats should explore some form of predator control to protect kids. Coyotes are the most common predator. The deadliest predators are mountain lions that travel miles to a meat goat herd and can kill large numbers in a short period of time. Fox and bobcat will prey upon young goats, typically less than a few weeks old. Eagles, buzzards and other birds of prey will be attracted to goat herds during kidding season and can cause substantial losses.

In some states, USDA Wildlife Services in cooperation with state and local governments employ government trappers who can assist ranchers. Trappers cover huge areas and they may be unable to get to everyone as often as needed. Many operations employ predator programs including trapping, calling and other lethal and non-lethal methods approved by USDA and their state.

Predator prevention programs may use livestock guardian animals including llamas, donkeys, and guardian dogs. If trained, all three can be effective depending on location, land type, neighbors, and public access. Many producers rely on Livestock Guardian Dogs (LGDs), particularly on large premises and open range. Some LGD breeds have a natural instinct to bark, roam and chase off predators which means they may not work well in smaller fenced areas adjacent to urban sprawl, but are very effective on rangeland. If LGDs are used where the public can interact with them, it is a good idea to include them in the farm liability coverage, or obtain a separate LGD policy.

Llamas eat the same food as goats. They work better in fenced pastures and farms in urban areas. Male llamas are not neutered until around age 3, but work best because they are the most territorial but need to be trained. While llamas are effective against the smaller predators such as coyotes, dogs and vultures, they may not be as effective against mountain lions.

A good guard donkey will kill a dog or coyote in seconds and a bad guard donkey can kill newborn kids just as quickly.

All guardian animals should be sourced from a reputable breeder and properly bonded with the goats. They will require supervision until they have been completely trained.

Health

Any livestock producer needs a working relationship with a good veterinarian. The veterinarian used for cattle operations, may be willing to assist with goats, or help find one in the area. Links are available at: <https://AmericanGoatFederation.org>.

Few drugs are listed for use in goats resulting in off label or extra label use, requiring a veterinary consult to legally use, source, and obtain proper dosage. A goat's metabolism rate is about twice that of a cow, and additional dosages for many antibiotics and dewormers are required in order to be effective. The American Consortium for Small Ruminant Parasite Control (ACSRPC) is a reliable resource for accurate information on using dewormers on goats: <https://www.wormx.info/>. Almost all antibiotics have withdrawal times and the veterinarian can help determine what it is for goats so they aren't used if the goat is going to market prior to withdrawal limits.

There are a few common goat health issues to be aware of. Some are similar to health issues in cattle. AGF has produced a handbook that includes illustrations and more information on these. It will be available on the AGF website.

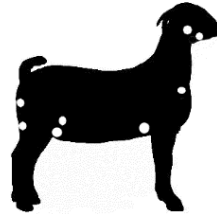
1. **Internal Parasites** can be a challenge in wet climates. Removing goats that get repeated parasite overloads will make management easier. The current recommendation is to deworm only when necessary.



2. **Sore mouth (called Orf in humans)** is a virus that causes lesions around the hairless areas of the goat, mainly on the the lips and nose. The severe form causes lesions inside the mouths of young kids, and on the anus, testicles, and udder of adults. Sore mouth will run its course, but can cause weight loss and death in some cases. Vaccine is available.



3. **Caseous Lymphadenitis or (CL)**, is a virus that causes abscesses in the area of lymph glands. While this disease is unsightly and can lead to health issues, it can be managed by quarantining any goat with an abscess and carefully draining the abscess when the skin bares off. The liquid is highly contagious and should be burned and the area sterilized. It is important to wear gloves when handling a CL.



4. Several reproductive diseases can affect goats, including Campylobacteriosis, Chlamydiosis, Toxoplasmosis and Coxiellosis (Q-fever). Coxiellosis is a highly contagious reproductive bacterial disease that can also infect humans. There is no treatment for Coxiellosis in goats. A veterinarian should be consulted for treatment of the other reproductive diseases. Reproductive diseases can be problematic in the event of a major breakout, and careful management is needed to minimize occurrence. This includes careful removal of any placental material and proper disposal.

5. Johnes, CAE and Scrapie are chronic diseases that occur in goats. Blood tests are effective for Johnes and CAE, but can be costly. These should be of concern and carrier goats removed from the herd.

Scrapie is a prion disease similar to BSE and regulated by USDA. The National Scrapie Eradication Program has tagging and recordkeeping requirements that must be followed. USDA should be contacted if any goat on the operation develops suspect symptoms. Information and assistance are available from AGF and USDA. For more Information: <https://EradicateScrapie.org>

6. In humid areas foot rot can be an issue. Having stoned areas where goats can avoid mud can help. Foot rot can be treated by completely trimming all of the dead area from the hoof, cleaning with a towel and treating with hoof treatment.

Annual vaccination requirements vary depending on the type of operation and area of the country. Veterinarians with goat experience, and experienced producers from the same location can assist with these decisions when needed.

Grazing and Nutrition

One of the greatest advantages of grazing goats with cattle is the benefit to the pasture or rangeland. Cattle are grazers and goats are browsers, and do not compete for the same forage as long as both types of feed are available. Goats prefer weeds and woody plants that are typically not consumed by cattle. This results in pastures and range lands being improved by goat browsing while creating a high value protein source. Goats don't perform as well on low quality forage, such as dormant grass or grass hay. A higher quality winter feed or supplement may be needed to support a highly productive goat herd.

Minerals are another important nutritional component for goats. They are essential to goats in confinement. Mineral supplementation should be based on regional needs and the overall nutritional program. Every major commercial livestock feed manufacturer offers mineral. What works for one goat operation may be not be suitable for another. Often cattle producers can make successful use of cattle mineral for goats.

Genetic Selection and Breeding

Goats are prolific breeders. Twins are normal, triplets are common, and singles are rare and often only occur in does for their first kidding. Crossbred does with Boer, Spanish, Savanna and Kiko genetics tend to be preferred in meat goat operations. Boers or Savannas contribute growth and muscling. Spanish and Kiko can help with udder quality, hardiness, and maternal instinct. A highly productive commercial goat for northern regions often includes Angora genetics. A good breeding program will result in large kid crops that are highly marketable.

Meat goats are known to breed out of season allowing different markets to be targeted. Accelerated management and breeding programs can produce 3 kid crops every 2 years, but require higher levels of nutritional, predation, and health management. Most commercial operations plan for does to kid once a year. Prime market conditions exist during Muslim holidays, though there is also a premium associated with US Holidays including Christmas and Easter. Ethnic populations create a year-round demand, and seasonal supply has large impacts on the market. The timing of kidding is best suited to the individual operation and their potential marketing windows.

Conclusion

Prices tend to remain strong as the demand for goat meat continues to exceed supply. This allows for better profit margins as cattle markets fluctuate, while reducing costs of controlling unwanted brush. Some reports have also shown that better parasite control can be achieved by running cattle and goats together.

Before expanding an operation to include commercial meat goats, or before beginning a new combined meat goat/cattle operation, it is a good idea to make a business plan. Researching and sourcing seedstock from a quality operation will provide a genetic foundation and sound basis for growth. Starting small and increasing the number of meat goats by retaining doe kids that are raised and adapted to your operation will make management much easier. Regardless of the size of the herd, it is essential to invest in obtaining quality goat knowledge and building a support network. The American Goat Federation can assist with getting started as well as provide contact information for producers who have been successfully running this type of operation.

This document was prepared by the AGF Industry Development Committee headed by Randy Dusek, Vice President of AGF and Tom Boyer, founding Director of AGF. The committee is comprised of experienced goat and cattle producers, livestock professionals, and veterinarians. Several online meat goat information seminars are available that give more detailed information for raising goats. You will find them, along with other resources and support at: <https://americangoatfederation.org/resources/>.

AMERICAN GOAT FEDERATION MISSION STATEMENT

The American Goat Federation promotes and facilitates the development of all segments of the goat industry including dairy, meat and fiber, by encouraging sound public policy, enhancing production and marketing of goat products, and promoting research beneficial to our member organizations and all producers.

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