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## U.S. Meat Goat Operations

The meat goat industry is one of the fastest growing segments of livestock production in the United States. The majority of all U.S. goats and kids are raised for meat. The rise in popularity and demand for goat meat is the primary reason for the industry's rapid growth (Spencer, 2005). The growing demand for goat meat reflects an increase in Hispanic, Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian, and Caribbean populations in the United States, as well as the growing niche markets interested in the unique flavor and health benefits of goat meat. These factors will likely continue to be the driving force for the U.S. meat goat industry.

The NAHMS Goat 2009 study was the first national study of the U.S. goat industry and was conducted in 21 of the Nation's major goat-producing States<sup>1</sup>. These States represented 75.5 percent of U.S. goat operations and 82.2 percent of U.S. goats (NASS 2007 Census of Agriculture). Data for the study were collected from a stratified random sample of goat operations that kept at least one goat for meat, dairy, fiber, or other purposes. A total of 2,484 operations completed the study's first survey questionnaire and 634 completed a second mail-in questionnaire. The second questionnaire was limited to operations with 10 or more goats<sup>2</sup>.

### <sup>1</sup>States and Regions:

**Northeast:** Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin

**Southeast:** Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Oklahoma (east), Tennessee, Texas (east), Virginia

**West:** California, Colorado, Oklahoma (west), Oregon, Texas (west), Washington.

<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise specified, data in this information sheet reflect operations with one or more goats.

### <sup>3</sup>Operation size:

**Very small:** 1 to 9 goats

**Small:** 10 to 19 goats

**Medium:** 20 to 99 goats

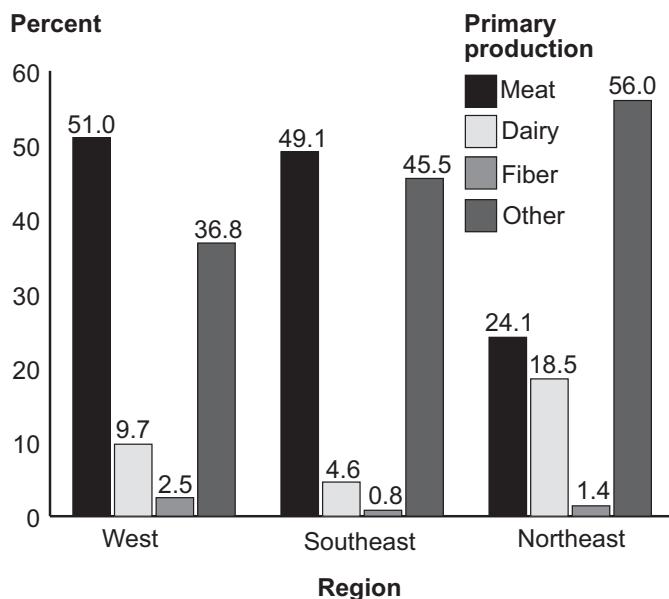
**Large:** 100 or more goats.

### General characteristics of U.S. meat goat operations

Overall, 42.6 percent of U.S. goat operations focused primarily on meat production, as opposed to dairy, fiber, or "other" production. The percentage of operations that focused on meat production increased with operation size<sup>3</sup>, ranging from 17.3 percent of very small operations to 76.8 percent of large operations.

Regionally<sup>1</sup>, about half of operations in the West and Southeast regions (51.0 and 49.1 percent, respectively) focused on meat production, compared with about one-fourth of operations in the Northeast region (24.1 percent) [figure 1]. Nearly three-fourths of all goats and kids (70.1 percent) were used primarily for meat production. A lower percentage of meat goat operations (11.2 percent) than dairy and fiber operations (33.8 and 27.5 percent, respectively) kept goats for more than one primary use (e.g., an operation might have meat goats and milk goats).

**Figure 1. Percentage of operations by primary production and by region**



All goats can be harvested for their meat; however, some breeds tend to excel at muscle production and have other qualities that make them especially well suited for meat production. Boer and Spanish goats are popular meat breeds. For meat goat operations with 10

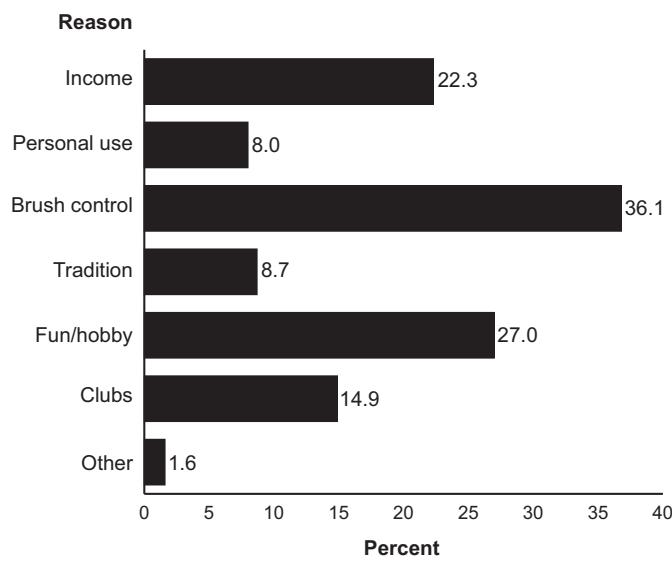
or more goats, 59.8 percent kept Boers does, 38.0 percent kept cross breed does, and 10.3 percent kept Spanish does. Less than 10 percent of meat goat operations with 10 or more goats had a majority of does of breeds other than Boer, cross breeds, or Spanish goats.

A lower percentage of meat goat operations than dairy goat operations (19.7 and 43.5 percent, respectively) belonged to a national goat association. Similarly, a lower percentage of meat goat operations than dairy goat operations belonged to a State/local goat association or club (15.8 and 26.5 percent, respectively). Many meat goat operators are relatively new to the goat industry, which might be one reason for these differences.

## Reasons for raising meat goats

Overall, income was rated a very important reason for raising goats on 22.3 percent of meat goat operations with 10 or more goats (figure 2). The percentage of meat goat operations in which income was a very important reason for raising goats increased as operation size increased; 13.7 percent of small operations, 21.7 percent of medium operations, and 54.3 percent of large operations rated income as a very important reason for raising goats. Brush control was rated a very important reason for raising goats on about one-third of all meat goat operations with 10 or more goats (36.1 percent). Fun/hobby was rated a very important reason for raising goats on a higher percentage of small and medium operations (25.3 and 28.2 percent, respectively) than large operations (10.9 percent).

**Figure 2. Percentage of meat goat operations that rated the following reasons for raising goats as very important**



## Years in meat goat business

The rise in the popularity and production of meat goats is the primary reason for the industry's rapid growth. This growth has brought many relatively new producers to the industry, particularly meat goat producers. For example, 35.0 percent of meat goat producers had raised goats for 5 years or less compared with 15.4 percent of fiber goat producers and 22.9 percent of dairy goat producers. Further, only 10.7 percent of meat goat producers had owned or managed goats for 21 or more years, compared with 37.1 percent of fiber goat producers and 20.1 percent of dairy goat producers.

## Feed and pasture management

Nearly all small meat goat operations managed their herds on either fenced range (uncultivated fenced pasture) or fenced farm (cultivated fenced pasture) [45.0 and 45.2 percent of operations, respectively]. More than 6 of 10 large meat goat operations (62.7 percent) managed their herd on fenced range, while less than 3 of 10 (28.1 percent) managed their herd on fenced farm. Only 5.7 percent of meat goat operations managed their herds on dry lot.

More than 9 of 10 meat goat operations (93.9 percent) had used pasture grasses as a feed source at least some of the time during the previous 12 months (July 1, 2008, to June 30, 2009), and two-thirds (65.1 percent) used pasture as a feed source all of the time. Almost 9 of 10 of meat goat operations (86.6 percent) had fed goats cut hay at least some of the time during the previous 12 months, and about 8 of 10 (83.2 percent) fed weeds/browse at least some of the time. One of 10 operations (11.0 percent) fed other roughage at least part of the time, and nearly two-thirds of operations (64.9 percent) fed commercial goat feed at least part of the time.

## Breeding management

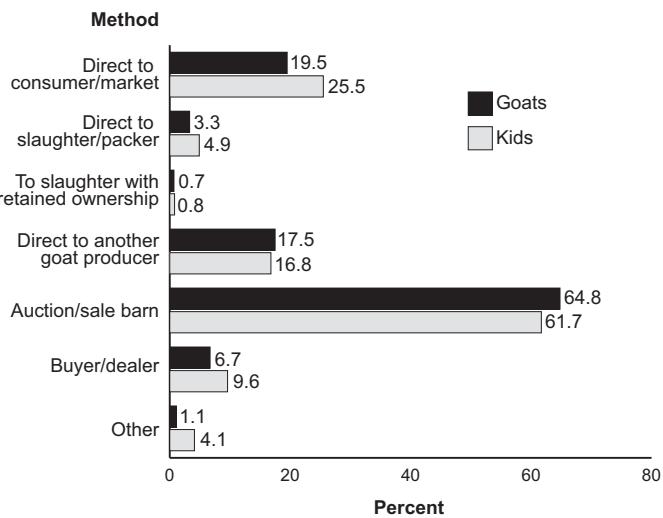
Nearly all meat goat operations with 10 or more goats (93.4 percent) had bred goats during the previous 12 months. A lower percentage of meat goat operations (38.9 percent) than dairy goat operations (50.8 percent) controlled breeding times to synchronize estrus during the previous 12 months. The majority of does on meat goat operations (80.4 percent) that were bred naturally during the last breeding season were bred to adult bucks over 18 months of age. Nearly one-half of does on meat goat operations (47.1 percent) had multiple kids compared with over two-thirds of does (68.4 percent) on dairy goat operations. Nursing only rather than hand/bottle feeding was the most common method for feeding newborn kids (88.1 percent of operations) on meat goat operations.

For operations with kids born during the previous 12 months, a lower percentage of meat goat operations (41.9 percent) had only one breeding season per year compared with dairy (78.7 percent) and fiber (83.0 percent) operations. Conversely, a higher percentage of meat goat operations (19.3 percent) had two defined breeding seasons per year compared with dairy (8.3 percent) and fiber (5.8 percent) operations. The same trend was observed for operations that had no defined breeding season, with 36.7, 12.3, and 11.2 percent of meat, fiber, and dairy operations, respectively, having no defined breeding season.

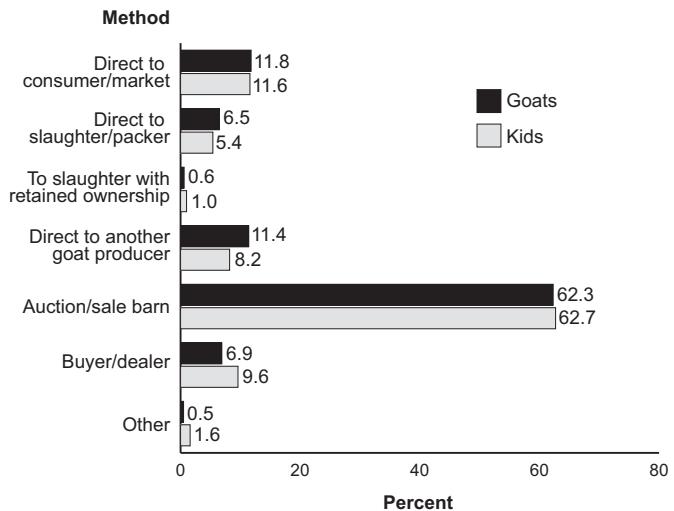
## Marketing

Marketing animals at an auction or sale barn requires little effort in finding a buyer. However, direct sales to consumers can be more profitable since there may be no transportation costs, middleman, or sales commission. About three of four meat goat operations (72.3 percent) had permanently removed either goats or kids during the previous 12 months. Of these operations, about two-thirds marketed the animals through an auction/sale barn (figure 3). Similarly, about two-thirds of all goats or kids permanently removed from meat goat operations were marketed through an auction/sales barn (figure 4). Removing through an auction/sale barn was more common for meat goat operations (64.8 and 61.7 percent of operations, respectively) than dairy goat operations (45.3 and 34.5 percent, respectively). Similarly, a higher percentage of goats or kids on meat goat operations were marketed through an auction/sale barn (62.3 and 62.7 percent, respectively) than goats or kids on dairy goat operations (43.9 and 27.5 percent, respectively).

**Figure 3. For operations that permanently removed goats or kids during the previous 12 month, percentage of operations by method of removal**



**Figure 4. For operations that permanently removed goats or kids during the previous 12 months, percentage of goats and kids by method of removal**



## Biosecurity and disease

Goat producers on operations with 10 or more goats were asked whether they were very familiar, somewhat familiar, or not familiar with several economically important diseases. Compared with dairy goat operations, a lower percentage of meat goat operations were somewhat or very familiar with brucellosis (68.9 and 54.8 percent, respectively), caprine arthritis encephalitis (CAE) [76.1 and 45.9 percent, respectively], caseous lymphadenitis (CL) [73.9 and 56.1 percent, respectively] and Johne's disease (61.5 and 41.5 percent, respectively).

Johne's disease in goats is difficult to diagnose and can cause weight loss despite a good appetite. Clinical signs common in cattle with Johne's disease are often not present in goats, and laboratory tests for Johne's disease are not as sensitive in goats as they are in cattle.

CL is an economically important disease in goats caused by the bacterium *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis*. Goats with CL often have abscesses along the neck or on the back of the rear legs. The disease can also cause internal abscesses and may reduce reproductive efficiency and result in condemnation of an infected carcass at slaughter. A relatively high percentage of meat goat operations had observed goats or kids with abscesses during the previous 12 months.

About half of meat goat operations with 10 or more goats (49.7 percent) had added does, bucks, or kids during the previous 12 months; of these operations, only about 1 of 10 (12.8 percent) required that new additions come from herds that were test-negative for CAE, Johne's disease, brucellosis, Q fever, CL, scrapie, TB, or other diseases.

Good biosecurity reduces the likelihood of introducing disease to a herd and also prevents disease spread among animals within a herd. Biosecurity measures include, but are not limited to, isolating new additions to the herd, testing new additions for disease, consulting a veterinarian regularly, and using animal identification.

Just over one-third of all meat goat operations (37.1 percent) consulted a veterinarian for any reason related to goat health during the previous 12 months compared with over half of dairy goat operations (55.2 percent). On operations with 10 or more goats with kids born and in which kids nursed their mothers, a lower percentage of meat goat operations (27.8 percent) than dairy goat operations (41.8 percent) kept doe/kid pairs separate from other goats.

When giving injections, using the same needle on several animals increases the risk of disease transmission between animals. Disinfecting needles between animals can decrease this risk. About two-thirds of meat goat operations with 10 or more goats (65.1 percent) gave at least 1 injection to goats during the previous 12 months. For operations that gave injections, meat goat operations had a higher average number of goats injected with the same needle (6.3) than dairy operations (3.0) or "other" operations (2.5).

Of operations with 10 or more goats with kids born during the previous 12 months, only about one-fifth of meat goat operations (21.5 percent) cleaned manure and waste bedding from the kidding area after each doe compared with 50.9 percent of dairy goat operations. Also, a higher percentage of meat goat operations compared with dairy goat operations (45.6 and 19.9 percent, respectively) disposed of placentas or aborted fetuses by leaving them in the field or birthing areas, as opposed to burning, composting, rendering, burying, or disposing of them in a landfill.

## Summary

More than half of meat goat operations rated income as a very important reason for raising goats. Brush control was another reason rated very important for raising goats. The majority of meat goat operations managed their goats on fenced pasture (uncultivated or cultivated).

The most common method of marketing meat goats or kids was through an auction or sale barn. Less than one in five meat goat operations belonged to a State or regional goat association or club, which might be because the meat goat industry has grown rapidly in recent years and many producers are relatively new to the industry.

## Reference

Spencer R. 2008. Overview of the U.S. meat goat industry. Alabama Cooperative Extension System. UNP-104. Available at: <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/U/UNP-0104/>. Accessed 10/10/11.

For more information, contact:

USDA-APHIS-VS-CEAH  
NRRC Building B, M.S. 2E7  
2150 Centre Avenue  
Fort Collins, CO 80526-8117  
970.494.7000  
Email: NAHMS@usda.gov

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/nahms>

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