Becoming Self-Sufficient With Goats

Growing your own food and raising animals, is part of the process of becoming self-sufficient, and will play a major role in the “Sustainability” of your future.

The following information is an overview of the basic information one needs when considering adding goats to their program. Goats are versatile animals that can be used for milk, meat, and fiber. They are also valued as family pets. Because they are smaller than cattle and have a shorter gestation period, 5 months versus 9 months, goats can be produced on less land, they reproduce faster, and they are more economical to feed.

Preparing For Goats

- You will need ample space for grazing and/or browsing. Animals that are confined to small places do not thrive well and experience more health problems. Goats prefer woody stemmed plants, vines and trees for browsing. They also need shade, as they prefer to rest out of the direct sun when ruminating.
- Goats will eat small trees and will strip the bark off as well, so do not enclose areas with trees that you don’t mind losing.
- Secure fencing is very important. You will need to consider the size of your breed and whether they are polled or non-polled, when choosing your fencing. A small webbed wire is preferred as they tend to stick their head through “anything” to browse, and horned goats WILL get their head through, but very often cannot get it back out. Goats are also very good climbers, and will climb a fence, as well as jump it, so ensure that your bracing posts are high enough to deter them. Consider spacing your posts closer than you would for larger livestock such as cattle or horses. Goats VERY MUCH enjoy rubbing their entire body lengthwise along a fence, and do it on a daily basis. Therefore, they will stretch a wire fence, or cause it to lose its elasticity, quickly. Your fencing will also be important in keeping predators such as dogs and coyotes away from your animals as well.
• Goats DO NOT like rain and wind, so some form of shelter should be available to them. A structure with at least 3 closed sides will suffice.

Choosing Your Goats

• Choice of breed type depends on what you plan to use the animal for. The following is a sampling of breed types and what they are best known for.

  1. Alpine and Nubian – Dairy; milk production
  2. Boer and Spanish – Meat production
  3. Angora and Cashmere – Fibers

• It is important to ensure that any animal you plan to purchase has been properly vaccinated and de-wormed. If you are visiting a prospective farm, pay close attention to the condition of the facilities, and if you are purchasing kids, ask to see the Sire and Dam.

• Goats are highly social animals and do better in small groups or herds. You may want to consider keeping 3 to 5 animals, if you can facilitate that many.

Nutrition

• Goats are ruminants, like cattle, and therefore do better with diets that supply protein. Their diet may consist of hay, grass, and grains. However, their nutrient needs are defined by their stage of life, and what their use is. Goats will usually prefer to graze on forage that is less than 6 inches because it is younger, and more tender. Grazing to the ground can lead to a heavy parasite load, as they are ingesting larvae from the soil.

• They require clean, fresh water at all times.

• Lactating does require optimum nutrition. Milk production requires many calories and can deplete Calcium levels at a very fast rate, especially if nursing triplets or quadruplets. It may be necessary to supplement them with additional Calcium.

• As ruminants, goats produce their own B-12. They require a variety of minerals and other elements, some of which occur naturally in the soil and grasses, to remain healthy. Including: Selenium, Potassium, Iron, Salt, and Sulfur.

• Overall appearance and behaviors of the animal can be good indicators of whether or not an animal is acquiring the needed minerals. Some occur in supplements are can be added to feed or mineral salts to ensure proper uptake.

• It is important to note that goats WILL OVEREAT! Be very careful with grains, and ensure that they are properly stored. Overeating can lead to a very quick and painful death from bloat.
Herd Health

• Vaccinate and de-worm as necessary. Overuse of de-wormers can lead to a decrease or complete loss of effectiveness. A general rule of thumb is that if the animal is new to your property, that they be de-wormed upon arrival (unless documented from seller), and they should be quarantined for up to 2 weeks. Many diseases and parasites can be quickly transmitted to healthy animals. It is better to be safe than sorry.

• Pay attention to the overall appearance and behaviors of your animals. Slight changes can be indicators of big problems.

• There are several general signs that a goat is not healthy. Runny nose, runny eyes, and crusty eyes are signs that a goat may be ill. Not eating, drinking, or isolating itself from the rest of the herd are indications that the goat is sick.

• Goats should NEVER have diarrhea. Diarrhea is a sign of a serious illness. If diarrhea is accompanied by vomiting, a toxin is usually the culprit and immediate administration of charcoal is necessary.

• A hot udder or grinding teeth are also signs of a sick goat.

• To check if a goat is dehydrated pinch the skin in front of the shoulder in the neck area. If the skin snaps back quickly the goat is probably not dehydrated. If the skin stays folded for a while after pinching, dehydration is probably a problem.

• Ensure that feeding areas are clean. Goats will defecate and urinate on or in ANYTHING! Always clean out feed bunks, tubs, buckets or troughs before you add fresh feed. Goats are highly susceptible to Coccidiosis, which is caused by Coccidia, a group of protozoan (single celled) parasites, that they become infected with after ingesting the oocyst ("egg") from soiled utensils or an unclean environment.

• To prevent bloating and other intestinal issues, don’t allow goats to graze if the pasture is wet from rain or even dew. Goats can also suffer from ticks, mites, and lice.

• Become familiar with FAMACHA scoring. This is a simple way to determine whether your animal is anemic, which is the result of intestinal parasites. This method was developed by three South African researchers (Drs Francois Malan, Gareth Bath and Jan van Wyk), where overuse of anthelmintic de-wormers led to resistance in South Africa. Simply learn to identify the correct color of the membrane around the eye, on a scale of 1 to 5. With bright pink being the best and white meaning near death.
**Milk and Meat**

- You don’t have to homogenize goat’s milk; it is *naturally* homogenized.
- Goat’s milk is about 85% less allergenic than Cow’s milk.
- Goat’s milk is easier to digest than cow’s milk and most closely matches the human body. It also contains less lactose.
- Goat meat is lower in total fat, saturated fat, calories and cholesterol than traditional meats.

**Available 4-H Resources**

Did you know that 4-H has multiple educational programs involving goats? Contact your UF/IFAS Extension Office for more details.

**Helpful websites and publications:**


[http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/AN/AN29400.pdf](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/AN/AN29400.pdf) - Goat Parasite Control—General Guidelines

[http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/IG/IG12900.pdf](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/IG/IG12900.pdf) - External Parasites of Sheep and Goats

[http://naturalsociety.com](http://naturalsociety.com) - Goat Milk vs. Cow Milk: The Milk Battle


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