



# Boer Goats

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There are essentially three ways to approach the Boer goat business. As a producer of registered purebred and percentage breeding stock, or as a producer of commercial meat goats, or a combination of both. In each case, the management and marketing are somewhat different.

The registered breeding stock business requires considerably more record keeping and administration. Maintaining a record of pedigrees and relationship between animals, as well as which doe is bred to which buck is essential, in order to avoid inbreeding. This is also necessary to ensure that all registration of your animals is accurate. The purebred breeding stock business requires more public relations, advertising and promotion than the commercial side of the business. In order to successfully market breeding stock, potential buyers must know you are there. This means that you need exposure, which can be through advertising, attending shows, becoming involved with goat associations, attending seminars,

establishing a web site, etc. It is also important that you strive to improve your herd each year and good quality bucks are key to that effort. When marketing purebred breeding stock, do not restrict your thinking or your efforts to any specific geographical location. All of North and South America is a potential market.

Production of commercial meat goats is rapidly expanding throughout Canada. There is a great demand for goat meat (chevon) and Canada imports several million pounds per year. We are years away from supplying the demand in Canada and a large number of Canadian meat goats are exported to the USA as well. As yet, there is no organized market for meat goats, which means that producers and producer groups must search out the best markets. Depending on your location, that market place may vary. With the exception of Vancouver in the west, the main market for chevon in Canada is in the east. Producers in Ontario and Quebec have the advantage of being close to a large market. As a result, their net return is

often better than what producers in the rest of Canada can obtain. This is due to the fact that the rest of Canada must pay the costs to get their goats to that market. The largest market areas in the USA are the eastern seaboard, Texas and California. There are obviously some costs involved in getting your goats to those markets. However, the net



return for shipping direct to those markets is very often better than if you sell to local buyers or local auction barns. Those local buyers are shipping most of their purchases to the markets mentioned above. They must make a profit at this, which comes out of the pocket of the producer. Consequently, the producer can do better by shipping direct to those markets, thus avoiding the middlemen. Goat associations and producer groups are in the process of developing a more orderly marketing system, which gives the producer more opportunities and better prices. It is interesting to note that while the supply of meat goats is rapidly increasing, the price that producers receive is also gradually improving.

Many producers raise a combination of commercial meat animals and breeding stock. To market their purebred breeding stock, all of the things mentioned above re exposure, advertising and promotion still apply. However, there is a good demand for both registered and unregistered percentage Boer females as breeding stock for commercial operations. Selling a percentage doe for breeding at two to three times the price you would get at the meat market is obviously good for the bottom line. Most producers are able to sell most of their percentage doe kids for breeding purposes, while the percentage bucks are going to the meat market.

The cost of production of goats can vary quite a lot. Much depends on your circumstances, your existing facilities, availability of pasture, distance from markets, etc. A recent survey by the Manitoba Goat Association indicates that average feed and operating costs were almost \$100 per breeding doe. There can be a lot of variation in fixed costs, depending on individual circumstances. If you charge all of your fixed costs to the goat operation, they could be as high as \$40 per doe. But if you have other business interests that the fixed costs are being charged against, as well as existing facilities, those fixed costs for the goat operation can in actual fact be very little. The

same MGA survey indicated that each breeding doe weaned an average of 1.64 kids. Therefore, you must apply that figure to your particular costs, to determine what your break-even point may be. If you are in the purebred breeding stock business, the cost of production is much higher than the figures mentioned above. Costs of registration, advertising, travel to shows and seminars, etc. will substantially increase the costs per breeding doe. But of course the rate of return increases as well.

With regard to facilities, keep in mind that goats dislike wind and hate to get wet. Facilities that allow them to get out of the elements are required. If any birthing (kidding) is being done during the cold months, an enclosed area that can be maintained at a reasonably warm temperature will be required. So far as fencing is concerned, wire mesh or electric are the most common. If you are using electric, a minimum of three wires will be required initially. When the goats learn to respect the electric wire, you may contain them with two wires. If there is a small opening in a fence, a goat will find it. In order to keep goats inside any fence, there must be sufficient feed inside that fence. If they are hungry, they will look for a way out.

Feeding and health care of goats is very similar to cattle, except on a much smaller scale. In the winter months, good quality hay and a grain ration should be fed. In the summer, good pasture is sufficient. Contrary to the stories about goats eating almost anything, they are actually quite picky eaters and require fresh clean water at all times. If the feed or water becomes contaminated with manure or other matter, the goats will not accept it. When considering the quality and quantity of your feed, keep in mind that the condition of the doe at breeding time has a huge influence on whether she will have one or more kids. For goats, twins are normal and triplets are common. But if a doe is in poor condition when she is bred, she is likely to have only a single kid. This can have serious

repercussions for your profit margin.

The gestation period for a goat is five months. With a little management, it is therefore possible to get three crops of kids within 24 to 26 months. On average, you can feed seven goats for the price of feeding one cow. With an average of 1.7 weaned kids per doe, this means that it is possible to raise 35 kids from those seven does over a two year period, as compared to the two calves that one cow will have in the same period. However, raising three crops of kids in two years means that you will end up doing some kidding during the winter months. You need a kidding room that can be kept reasonably warm to accomplish that. An 80 pound calf will survive temperatures slightly above freezing and a little wind, but an 8 pound newborn kid will not.

The meat goat industry in North America

is still a very young industry. The Boer goat only arrived here in 1994 and began having an impact on the goat industry in 1996. Since that time, the number of meat goats in Canada has been steadily rising. The growth of the commercial industry also increases the demand for percentage and purebred breeding stock. The steady improvement in the marketing of commercial meat animals, combined with this demand for breeding stock, means that the potential for profit with meat goats is one of the bright spots in agriculture. It is one of the few businesses that have the potential of returning your initial investment in the first year, if you sell all your production. Given the potential of the Boer meat goat industry, most producers will retain some of their doe production, to increase the size of their herd and their future profit potential.

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