

## RESEARCH CENTERS

### Survey examines Oklahoma, Texas meat goat industry

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**The meat goat** industry has become one of the fastest growing agricultural industries in the United States over the last few decades. Between 1987 and 2012, the number of meat goats increased by 395 percent from 415,196 to 2,053,228. Contributing factors to this growth include increased demand from immi-



grants who consume goat meat, establishment of the American Meat Goat Association and the repeal of 1954 Wool Act. In spite of the significant increase in domestic production, consumer demand continues to outpace production with the shortfall supplied primarily from Australia and New Zealand.

According to the 2012 United States Census of Agriculture, producers in Oklahoma and Texas produced 37 percent of the total U.S. meat goat production. This makes them a major supplier of goat meat in the country. Because of the production size in this region and the overall shortfall in domestic production, we conducted a survey of meat goat producers to gain a better understanding of the makeup of the industry and to



help us discover potential benefits and challenges that may exist for those who might be interested in getting in the meat goat business in the region.

Survey responses from 62 meat goat producers operating in the region revealed the average farm size was 369 acres, on which 214 acres were used to produce an average of 75 meat goats per farm. In addition, 74 percent indicated they followed a pasture-based management system. Furthermore, the average age of producers was 54 years, and 81 percent of them have a college degree. Moreover, 37 percent of the respondents reported they consider themselves to be

risk-averse, and 54 percent hold an off-farm job. In terms of marketing, producers reported that on average 40 percent of their farm income is derived from selling meat goats. However, only about 15 percent of their total household income is generated from the meat goat sales. In addition, 86 percent of meat goat producers reported selling their goats directly to consumers, while 73 percent market their goats through auctions.

In addition to questions to help us understand general farm and producer characteristics, we also asked questions to better understand the perceived benefits and challenges associated

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Table 1: Number of Respondents (N), Mean, Minimum and Maximum Responses to Questions Regarding Perceived Benefits and Challenges for Entering the Meat Goat Business in the Southern Great Plains

<b>Perceived Benefits: To what extent do you agree or disagree that your selection of a goat enterprise as opposed to other agricultural enterprises is because of the following reasons?</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>
Producers Enjoy Working with Goats	61	4.5	2	5
Goat Production Fits Well into Land Management Plan	61	4.3	3	5
Goat Grazing Preferences are Different from Other Species	61	4.3	2	5
I Can Raise Goats on a Relatively Small Acreage	61	4.2	1	5
Goats Have Shorter Production Cycles than Other Livestock Enterprises	61	4.0	1	5
My Family Can be Involved in the Goat Enterprise	60	3.9	1	5
Sustainable Control of Weeds and Brush	61	3.8	1	5
Strong Market Demand and Prices for Goats	60	3.7	1	5
Goat Production is a Form of Hobby	61	3.6	1	5
Goats Combine Well with Cattle Enterprises	61	3.6	1	5
Goats are Prolific Breeders	61	3.5	1	5
Goat Production is Profitable	60	3.3	1	5
Low Cost to Purchase and Raise Goats	60	3.0	1	5
A High Level of Skill is Not Mandatory for Producing Goats	61	2.6	1	5
<b>Perceived Challenges: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following challenges are having significant negative impacts on goat producers in your area?</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>
Internal Parasites	62	4.3	2	5
High Cost of Production	61	4.0	1	5
Lack of a Goat Meat Processor Nearby	61	4.0	1	5
Lack of a Clear Marketing System for Goats	59	3.9	1	5
Insufficient Government Support for the Industry	61	3.8	1	5
No Grading System for Goats	60	3.4	1	5
Pasture Management Problems	61	3.4	1	5
Predators	60	3.4	1	5
Diseases	61	3.3	1	5
Lack of Steady Demand for Goat Meat	60	3.0	1	5
Surplus Supply of Foreign Goat Meat Product	61	2.9	1	5

Based on a Low to High (1 to 5) Rating of Importance

with the meat goat business. Producers were asked to rate their responses to questions from a low to high level of importance (i.e., from 1 to 5). The questions and mean responses for these two categories are reported in Table 1. The results indicated that enjoyment from working with goats, being a good fit to the overall land management plan and the ability to raise goats on small acreages were the top three perceived benefits. Al-

though the results show profitability is important, it is not as important as quality-of-life goals, like the enjoyment obtained with working with goats on small a scale.

Challenges most important to producers were closely tied to production and marketing issues. On the production side, mitigation of parasites, predators and diseases were important and would certainly lead to higher production costs. Issues

primarily related to marketing would lead to greater price and yield risk, all of which can be an impediment for risk-averse producers.

For those interested in the meat goat business, it is important to understand the potential challenges with having goats and to spend some time investigating the management and marketing practices best suited for your resources before diving head first into the meat goat business. ■