

So You Want to be a Goat Farmer

Commercial Meat Goat Farming

Deciding to become a commercial meat goat farmer takes a lot of thought and planning. This fact sheet will help answer some of your questions and guide you in the right direction to learn more. A commercial meat goat farm is a farm that is set up for the purpose of producing meat goats for sale as breeding animals and/or meat.

Who is Ontario Goat?

Ontario Goat (OG) is a united producer organization proudly representing Ontario's meat, meat and fibre sectors. OG is dedicated to enhancing the goat industry through education, collaboration, innovation and strategic alliances. OG represents Ontario's goat producers with an organization focused on sustainable growth, industry development and profitability, for all sectors of the industry to reach their full potential. OG is governed by a Board of Directors of nine elected producers and works to advance the goat industry through lobbying and government relations, research and industry development, consumer marketing and promotions, communications, and organizational development.

How do I get started as a commercial meat goat farmer? If you do not have previous goat experience the best place to start is to volunteer at an established meat goat farm. This will give you an idea of whether or not goats are right for you. Goats as a hobby are very different than a herd of meat goats. Working on a commercial meat goat farm will not only give you experience but you will learn first-hand the amount of work involved with caring for a herd of goats, especially at kidding time. It is also a good idea to attend industry events, meetings, shows etc. It is a great way to network with producers and learn about the industry.

Do I need a business plan?

As with any new business you need to develop a business plan. This process will help you think about what you really want to achieve. The business plan should include asking yourself the following questions:

- What are your goals, what do you want to achieve?
- What is your risk management tolerance?
- How do you plan to achieve your goals?
- What is your strategy?
- What is your vision for your business?
- What is your marketing plan?
- What do you need to get started?

Can I be a full-time meat goat farmer?

In order to be a full-time meat goat farmer with no other off-farm income there are a lot of points to consider and the best place to start is by determining cost of production. This will help you determine if there will be income over the cost of production. By crunching the numbers you will know if you can afford to be a full-time meat goat farmer.

Marketing

As a goat farmer you want to plan breeding in advance. Producers should be aware of their customers' religious holidays and customs, which may require changes in breeding, feeding and management. For example, production of goat products in Ontario is seasonal due to a goat's natural breeding cycle. Some producers, in meat goat operations, use management of lighting and hormone regimens to extend breeding cycles. Applying these production techniques can potentially improve profitability on goat farms and allow producers to target religious holidays year round. Please visit our website for your copy of the [ethnic holiday calendar](#).

How do I market finished kids?

As a meat goat farmer there are a couple different options to market your finished kids. You can market direct to packer, or you can send finished kids to a sales barn. Another option is to develop a freezer trade business.

A listing of provincially licensed goat plants is available at:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/maps/TblGoats.htm>

To find a licensed auction market close to you visit

http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/meatinsp/lscsa_list.htm.

How do I develop a freezer trade business?

As a farmer it is your responsibility to know the rules and regulations about selling goats for meat. According to the *Food Safety and Quality Act, 2001 – 3.1 (1&2)* it is illegal to sell a farm slaughtered carcass, part of a farm slaughtered carcass or a farm slaughtered product. It is also illegal to transport or deliver a farm slaughtered carcass, part of a farm slaughtered carcass or a farm slaughtered product 3.1 (1&2). That means you as a farmer are not allowed to slaughter an animal and sell, donate or give it away to a consumer and it also means that it is illegal for a person to transport the animal after it is dead for consumption.

If you are caught slaughtering and selling goat meat in pieces or a whole carcass the fines can be substantial. It is always better to take an order and have the animal processed in an approved licensed slaughter plant. To learn more about the regulations of the Food Safety and Quality Act, 2001 visit http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_01f20_e.htm

Financing

In order to proceed, you will need to ensure your financing is in order. Starting a new venture is expensive, consult with a lender experienced in agriculture. It is also recommended to review your business plan with your accountant before beginning. Depending on programs there may be grants available through the [Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association](#).

Where can I purchase goats?

Starting with good breeding stock is highly recommended in order to keep diseases under control and to start with a good line of genetics. It is also important to take into consideration what traits you are looking for in a goat. If your intent is to sell breeding stock then papered purebreds of good conformation are a good starting point. If looking to produce fast growing kids for the terminal market then perhaps crossbred, moderate sized does that milk heavy are a better fit. Some traits will be important no matter what you are doing but some traits become more important than others depending on your market. There are a couple of approaches to purchasing goats, including:

- Purchasing registered or grade goats
- Purchasing young doelings, bred or not
- Purchase mature does, bred or not, with or without kids
- Experienced producers recommend purchasing pregnant does/doelings that are no more than 90 days pregnant or at the time of dry off, especially during the winter months. It gives pregnant does time to adjust before kidding. Careful attention should be paid to body condition of pregnant does, poor condition could impact kidding. For additional management information refer to the *Best Management Practices for Commercial Goat Production*.

Whichever route you decide the most important factor before you purchase goats is, what is the disease status of the seller's herd? Your best investment for long-term profitability is proven disease-free goats. A verbal verification that the goats are disease free is **NOT** satisfactory; in order to prove the goats are disease-free the seller must provide a health certificate from their veterinarian proving the status. Purchasing goats with an unknown health status should not even be considered when deciding on where to purchase goats. Once you have diseases in your herd you will not easily eradicate them. It will end up costing more money in the end. Just remember **BUYER BEWARE**. Also refer to *So You Want to be a Goat Farmer: Buying Goats*. [Breeder directories](#) are available on Ontario Goat's website.

Do I need a veterinarian?

Before you purchase goats it is advisable to contact a veterinarian specializing in goats to discuss what diseases you should be screening for and to develop a parasite control and vaccination program. You may wish to have the veterinarian perform a health check or take samples for additional testing before you finalize the deal to purchase goats. It is also highly advisable to establish a working relationship with a veterinarian, this is key to the success of your goat farm. The veterinarian along with your nutritionist is part of your farm team to make educated, consistent changes to benefit your herd. The veterinarian will be more up-to-date on your herd health practices and will be able to give a sound diagnosis should any health issues arise. To find a veterinarian specializing in goat production visit the [Small Ruminant Veterinarians of Ontario's website](#).

Feeding and nutrition

Along with your veterinarian a goat feeding specialist is critical to establishing feeding protocols for your herd. Before purchasing meat goats contact a couple of feed companies to see the type of feeding programs they offer and if their protocols fit with your feeding plans and available storage. Where possible work with your nutritionist to utilize the grains and feeds available off the farm, this will help to reduce feed costs. When planning your feed requirements for the year, be sure to stockpile extra feed, especially hay. Goats require a lot of good quality hay and you never want to run out or limit feed hay to goats, because it could affect their health, the function of their rumen and the developing kids if they are pregnant. Feeding good quality hay will help to keep your reduce grain feed costs. Keep track of your feed supply during the year to make sure you will have enough feed through the winter months. Also in your planning process ensure there is a reliable source of clean water, watering systems and equipment that are accessible to goats and that are easy to clean, especially in the winter months. For additional management information refer to the *Best Management Practices for Commercial Goat Production*.

Raising young stock

Ensure you have proper housing for the kids. It should be free of drafts, warm and well ventilated. It is important to work with a nutritionist to establish a feeding program for replacement stock. The average feed cost to raise a doeling to breeding age is approximately \$125.00

As part of your fact finding mission into starting a commercial meat goat farm it is highly recommended to visit as many meat goat farms as possible, attend as many industry events and meetings as possible. No two meat goat farms are the same and a lot of valuable information will be learned from each and every visit, industry event and meeting attended.

For more information on farming goats refer to:

- [*Best Management Practices for Commercial Goat Production*](#)
- [*Biosecurity Planning Guide for Canadian Goat Producers*](#)
- [*National Farm-level Biosecurity Standard for the Goat Industry*](#)
- [*Canadian Goat On-Farm Food Safety Program*](#)
- [*Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of farm animals-Goats*](#)
- [*Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of farm animals-Transportation*](#)
- [*Facts and Figures about Canadian Goat Farming*](#)

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