

So You Want to be a Goat Farmer

Commercial Dairy Goat Farming

Deciding to become a commercial dairy 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 dairy goat farm is a farm that profits from the sale of goat milk.

Who is Ontario Goat?

Ontario Goat (OG) is a united producer organization proudly representing Ontario's dairy, 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 dairy goat farmer?

If you do not have previous goat experience the best place to start is to volunteer at an established dairy 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 milking goats. Working on a commercial dairy 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 milking goats, especially at kidding time.

Do I need a business plan?

As with any new business you need 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 plan?
- What is your strategy?
- What is your vision for your business?
- What is your marketing plan?
- What do you need to get started?

Insurance

It is important to contact an insurance broker before beginning to milk to ensure you and the farm are adequately prepared in the event of an unforeseen incidence. Ask if your broker offers a dairy specific package.

Can I be a full-time dairy goat farmer?

In order to be a full-time dairy 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 dairy goat farmer.

How do I market the milk?

In order to market fluid goat milk you must first receive Grade A status from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and have one of the following: an agreement with one of the brokers of milk, a direct contract with a licensed processing plant or be a licensed processing plant. Geographic location may be a factor; it depends on established milk truck routes.

An OMAFRA inspector will visit your farm to ensure you are complying with the *Milk Act*. This act outlines practices that are important for ensuring you are producing safe, high quality milk. The inspector will look at your milk house, milk house waste, cooling equipment, milking procedure, milking equipment, livestock housing and care, and other important factors influencing milk quality and food safety. If your facility is not certified or any load of milk is not Grade A quality, it will not be collected and must be disposed of by the producer. Your facility must be inspected prior to the startup of a new operation and on an ongoing basis. Detailed requirements and points of inspection can be found on OMAFRA's website: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/dairy/page-1.htm#3>.

It is advisable to contact the Dairy Food Safety Program at OMAFRA in the Food Inspection Branch at 519-826-4583 to arrange an on-farm meeting to review the Grade A requirements to milk goats.

For more information about marketing fluid milk contact:

Gay Lea Foods Co-operative Ltd.
Hewitts's dairy Ltd.
128 King Street East, P.O. Box 400
Hagersville, ON N0A 1H0

Ontario Dairy Goat Cooperative
General Manager
Box 71, 5 Industrial Road
Teeswater, ON N0G 2S0
Office: 519-392-8926

Kevin Weaver, Dairy Goat Industry Advisor
Office: 519-644-1881 Cell: 519-615-2311
Email: kweaver@gayleafoods.com

Gerald Townsend, Dairy Goat Industry Advisor
Office: 519-848-5527 Cell: 519-820-5736
Email: gtownsend@gayleafoods.com

What is the minimum amount of milk required for a pick up?

Goat milk is typically picked up every other day year round except when the minimum of 500 litres is being produced only then it is twice a week pick up, specific details would be discussed with your broker. The average dairy goat produces three litres/day, production fluctuates throughout the goat's milk production cycle, you will need to plan production accordingly.

Can I process my own goat milk?

In order to process your own milk and milk products you must have a license to pasteurize your own milk. Any products derived from milk (e.g. cheese and soap) must also be pasteurized.

The sale of unpasteurized milk and milk derived products is illegal in Ontario under the [*Health Protection and Promotion Act*](#)

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?

In order to finalize your contract with one of the brokers a new producer must secure their milking goats. There are a couple of approaches to purchasing goats, including:

- Purchasing goats that are already milking
- Purchasing young doelings, bred or not
- Purchasing registered or grade goats
- Experienced producers recommend purchasing pregnant does/doelings no more than 90 days pregnant or at the time of dry off, especially during the winter months. 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.

Housing

There are a variety of possibilities available for housing dairy goats. Regardless of the option you choose, one of the most critical aspects to determine, before you purchase the goats, is how many goats your facility can handle comfortably. Each adult animal needs at least 2.3m² or 25ft². To calculate square footage or meterage, measure the length and width of the pen area and multiply those numbers together to determine the pen area in feet or metres squared. It is very important that the pen area is measured in advance of the goat purchase to avoid overcrowding. For further information about housing refer to the *Best Management Practices for Commercial Goat Production*.

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. 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 are 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 milking 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. When planning your feed requirements for the year, be sure to stockpile extra feed, especially hay. Goats require a lot of 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. 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 separate from adult goats. 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 dairy goat farm it is highly recommended to visit as many dairy goat farms as possible. No two dairy goat farms are the same and a lot of valuable information will be learned from each and every visit.

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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