

GOAT MEAT PRODUCTION

Introduction

Goat meat is one of the most widely eaten meats in the world and a staple protein for many people. It can be known by various terms including cabrito, chevon and mutton, and is a traditional dish served for many religious and cultural occasions. This can lead to specific seasonal demands coinciding with specific holidays.

Goat farming in Ireland today is mainly focussed on dairying, but historically goats were kept for a range of purposes and goat meat was widely consumed. In recent decades, goat meat has fallen out of favour but is now seeing a resurgence. Changes in the ethnic makeup of our population, as well as an emphasis on healthy food options, have also led to a demand for goat meat. The scale of this market is more difficult to estimate. The number of goats kept for meat production in Ireland is extremely difficult to



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quantify as the National Sheep & Goat Census doesn't distinguish between animal type (for goats) or breed. In addition, many goats reared for meat production are from the dairy herd. It is likely to be a small percentage of the overall goat population.

Did you know?

- The main breed used for goat meat production in Ireland is the Boer;
- while grass is a high-quality and cheap feed, goats can also utilise other poorer-quality forage;
- goat meat has lower calories, cholesterol and fat than almost any other meat and

has comparable levels of protein;

- other breeds that can be used for meat are the Anglo-Nubian and Kalahari Red; and,
- because it is so lean, goat is usually slow-roasted or cooked in stews and curries to ensure it is tender.

Markets and supply

The usual paths to market for cattle and lambs are not available for goats and the supply of goat meat must be tailored to what the purchaser wants. Rearing a group of animals to slaughter weight, as would be done with lambs, is not advisable as there is currently no purchaser who will buy animals in this manner. However, where a steady supply of animals can be maintained, consumers are guaranteed availability of the product and markets can be established and developed. At the moment the most profitable (but challenging) outlet for goat meat production is into high-end restaurants and specialist shops. However, relationships need to be developed and a small but steady supply of animals must be maintained.

Useful information

- Global production and consumption of goat meat are growing steadily;
- high-quality goat meat can achieve a premium of 30-40% over lamb prices;
- carcass weights similar to lambs are most commonly produced;
- some festivals call for carcass weights as low as 5kg;
- kill-out percentages for goats can be slightly higher than lambs;
- dairy-type animals are more expensive and take longer to finish; and,
- growth rates in excess of 200g/day can be achieved with Boer kids.

02: Goat Meat Production

Goat meat farming

What type of enterprise?

You can either purchase kids for finishing or create your own herd of goats for a suckling-type system. For the straight finishing system, purchase price and costs are critical. For the suckling system, output per doe is critical, along with minimising costs.

Sourcing goats

A goat enterprise can fail due to poor health, quality and performance in the foundation stock; therefore, be extremely cautious when sourcing animals for your herd. Always try to purchase the best-quality animals possible, but it is vital that animals only come from healthy herds. Sourcing goats can sometimes be difficult, so contact a number of farms well in advance to discuss the potential purchase of animals. Importing goats can be costly and highly restricted on health grounds.

Animal type

Animal type will have a bearing on costs, output and the overall value of a carcass. Straight dairy-type animals will be readily available at certain times of year and can be cheap to purchase but will take longer and more inputs to finish. Pure Boer animals will have higher-quality carcasses but may have more value being sold as breeding stock. Some dairy farms are now running Boer goats with a portion of their herds. These crossbred animals can be very suitable for meat production.

Facilities

If you are grazing your goats, you will need proper fencing to safely manage them. A number of strands of electric fence are ideal, at a minimum of 1.07m high. Sheep fencing may also be used but close supervision is required to prevent heads

and horns getting tangled. An electric wire should also be installed above the sheep wire. Barbed wire is not suitable for goats, as they are prone to climbing and it will cause injury.

Regular faecal egg counts should also be carried out to monitor worm populations. Many farm buildings can be adapted for use with meat goats.

Maximise your meat

If you decide to sell your meat direct, it is important to find value in as much of the carcass as possible. The loin and legs will sell quickly, but less desirable cuts and off-cuts can also have significant value if treated properly. Diced meat, kebabs, burgers, charcuterie, curries and stews are just some of the ways that value can be added to lower-value cuts.

Teagasc training

Teagasc provides a 25-hour Introduction to Goat Farming course for those interested in taking up the enterprise. Teagasc also has a broad suite of training options for anyone considering developing a food product with Food Innovation, Butchery/Small Scale Meat Production and Food Safety among those programmes available.

You can find information on many of these courses on www.teagasc.ie or by registering through www.opt-in.ie.

DAFM requirements and supports

In order to keep goats in Ireland you must be registered with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). If you do not currently have a herd number, you must contact your local Regional Veterinary Office for registration form ER1 (or download one from the DAFM website) and once completed, an official will inspect your holding to ensure it is suitable for keeping goats. Once you are issued with your herd number you can order tags for your goats. (Identification

and tagging requirements can be downloaded here <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealth/welfare/animalidentificationmovement/nationalgoatidentificationsystem/>.) Grant aid is currently available for goat housing and handling facilities. The rate is typically 40%. Currently, fencing for goat enterprises is not grant aided. The requirements and specifications are available on the Department website: www.agriculture.gov.ie.

Further information

For further information, please contact Cian Condon, Environment and Technology Advisor – Drystock and Goats at:

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The following resources are also helpful:

www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/goats/

www.teagascgoatblog.blogspot.com/p/the-irish-goat-hub.html

www.facebook.com/Irish-Goat-Producers-Association-148588291885911/

www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev



www.teagasc.ie

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