Ten of Them

Beginner tips for raising sheep & goats

1 **Start small**. Starting small (e.g., 5-20 ewes/does) reduces investment and risk. It is especially important if you have never raised livestock before, especially sheep and goats. Starting small helps you decide if you like raising small ruminants and/or if they fit into your farming operation, without taking on a lot of risk.

2 **Good fencing and facilities**. Have your fencing and facilities built and/or in-shape before buying your first sheep/goats. Predator control starts with a good fence. Goats can be particularly crafty at getting out of fences. Interior fences (including virtual fences) allow for rotational grazing and better forage utilization and worm control.

3 **Forage first**. A forage-first diet is the foundation of healthy sheep and goats. Most of nutritional requirements can be met with forage: pasture, hay, or silage. At the same time, do not be afraid to supplement with grains and other feedstuffs. Lactating females and growing lambs/kids often require supplementation to meet their increased dietary needs.

4 **Find a veterinarian** and establish a veterinarian-client-relationship. You cannot use antibiotics and extra label drugs without veterinarian involvement. A veterinarian should be part of your animal health team.

5 **Buy from reputable breeders**. Good breeders stand behind their animals and do not intentionally sell inferior stock. There is nothing worse than starting your sheep/goat enterprise with a bunch of duds. It is generally recommended that you do not buy breeding stock from public auctions (sale barns). There is truth to the idiom, "you get what you pay for!"

6 **Choose the right species and breed(s).** Consider whether sheep or goats (or both) are the best fit for your farm. There are many breeds. Choose the ones that can meet the goals of your farm. At the same time, be sure the breeds (and species) you choose are adapted to your climate and proposed management system.

7 **Take advantage of university/extension resources**. Land grant universities via Cooperative Extension provide research-based unbiased information. Take advantage of their virtual and in-person learning opportunities. Beware of what you read on the internet. Consider the source and bias of all online information, including Facebook and YouTube videos.

8 **Practice good biosecurity**. Healthy animals are the foundation of a successful sheep/goat enterprise. Start with disease-free animals. Close your flock/herd as soon as possible to outside animals. Quarantine all new stock. Recognize the risks of showing. Get a premise ID for scrapie eradication.

9 **Do a business plan**. If you are planning to raise sheep/goats for a profit, do a business plan first. If something is not profitable on paper, it is not going to be profitable in the real world. You should also do a business plan if you are planning to expand or change your production system.

10 **Join.** Network with other producers and experts by joining local, state, regional, and/or national associations.

BECOME A MEMBER

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