

G2000/W08



Producer Research Support

Economic Evaluation of Goat Meat in a Mixed Farming Enterprise

WA Goat Meat Producers



This project identifies the profit drivers of goat meat production and concludes that the profitability compares poorly with other production options. The project does consider the economic benefits of goats as weed control agents in cropping enterprises.

Financial information has been generated from four different production methods and is available to be used to inform decision making for existing and planned goat meat enterprises.

The project

The WA Goat Meat Producers group consists of 30 goat meat producers, interested in evaluating the performance of a best practice goat meat enterprise against the outcomes of research undertaken in Queensland and Western Australia.

The project intended to compare three enterprises, in the southern, eastern and northern regions of WA. Each goat meat production activity on each property was to be recorded, with group members assisting to build an economic study of the enterprise in their region.

Activities of interest such as husbandry, weed control and comparisons of growth rates and subsequent prices for different breed crosses were also monitored.

Objectives

1. demonstrate the commercial viability of a goat meat enterprise, while operating as close to best practice as possible, including the benefits goats in weed control;
2. develop and publish a practical benchmark study for goat meat production that provides a direct comparison with other farm enterprises, and as a consequence;
 - identify the animal husbandry and other requirements of a goat meat enterprise;
 - assess growth rates of meat goats in a commercial environment;
 - assess the market options for different aged goats;
 - assess the value of goats in weed control (including herbicide resistant weeds);
 - apply information available from MLA;
 - involve as many producers as possible;
 - increase the number of farmers involved in producing goats for meat; and
 - develop a brochure to promote the industry.

What was done

A benchmark study for goat meat production was conducted to provide a comparison between other farm enterprises.

It was assumed that land and infrastructure for grain/ sheep/ cattle and grazing enterprise already existed. Additional costs, (such as fertiliser, supplementary hay/feed, mineral supplement and animal treatments) for running the goat enterprise were therefore included.

Individual enterprises were provided with basic record keeping tools, which were adapted to their own record keeping and computer systems.

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Key points

- This project demonstrated the commercial viability of a goat meat enterprise alongside other farming activities, and the potential to generate income from an alternative source to existing farming operations.
- Other producers are encouraged to become involved in the goat industry.
- A guide for current and potential producers was developed, to enable them to apply the project results to their own enterprise.

Producer Research Support

MLA Producer Research Support offers support funding of up to \$15,000 over three years for groups of producers keen to be active in on-farm research and demonstration trials.

These activities include:

- Producer Initiated Research and Development
- More Beef from Pastures demonstration trials
- Prime Time Wean More Lambs demonstration trials
- Sustainable and productive grazing grants.

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What happened?

Although growth rate was not assessed by scale weight, visual appraisal and final sale weights indicated that careful management with protein and mineral boost can improve kidding percentage, as well as kidding weight and growth rate.

Roughage is an essential component of the goat diet and must be available at all times. Soil and plant leaf testing may be necessary to identify the appropriate mineral supplements for goats, as there is a large variation in type of feed available between regions. Goats continue to gain or maintain weight grazing stubble after it has been grazed by sheep – thus maximizing stubble as summer feed.

Provision of natural shelter (trees, fallen trees and rock outcrops) or fabricated wind-breaks reduces kidding losses and enhances growth.

Returns per head ranged from \$30 for capretto to \$60 for live export, however these must be assessed against costs and returns per hectare. Variable returns were determined to be due to turn off time and market choice.

Goats will eat almost any plant – dry, green and even when pasture dries off. They continue to gain weight on any diet, minimising carry over of unwanted trash and seeds. Goats eat out weeds and grasses that are competing with clover pastures – enabling the clover to flourish and enhance seed set. They thrive on a combination of stubble or roughage and summer weeds such as wire weed, mint weed or melon vines. Goats will eat these weeds green or dry, eliminating the need for herbicide spraying or cultivation. Goats were used for this purpose over 800 hectares of a cropping program with an estimated saving of around \$8.50 per hectare.

Improved communication between all sectors and stakeholders in the industry would enhance the image of the industry. Individual enterprises need to choose the target market and product turn off time to suit their enterprise to maximise returns. Continuity of supply of a consistent product could lead to the development of long-term niche markets. Market chain alliances based on continuity and trust will improve returns to all stakeholders.

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Discussion

Two years of drought meant that the wider comparisons originally planned, were not undertaken. Actual returns per hectare can vary considerably depending on kidding percentage, the market chosen, timing of sale and the use of goats as a complementary element of the farm enterprise. Minor changes to goat enterprise production management and market choice can significantly alter the outcome.

Financial information has been generated from four different production methods and is available to be used to inform decision making for existing and planned goat meat enterprises.

Next steps

Adverse seasonal conditions made it hard to maintain interest, but the original core group of producers have maintained involvement. Two field days and two information days have provided an opportunity for other producers to become involved.

It was considered that field days were the most appropriate mechanism for communicating with stakeholders in the goat meat industry and the development of a brochure was not undertaken.

Unless the price paid to producers increases dramatically it is unlikely that there will be any substantial increase in the number of farmers producing quality goats for meat.

MLA also recommends EDGENetwork

EDGENetwork offers practical field-based workshops to improve productivity and profitability for the long-term.

Workshops cover breeding, nutrition, grazing management, marketing and selling.

Call MLA on 1800 993 343 or
www.edgenetwork.com.au

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