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Dairy goats and goat milk products

Bruce McGregor

Introduction

The production of goat-milk products in Australia is valued at approximately $1 million/year. The small dairy-goat industry has traditionally supplied fresh milk for health purposes.

In recent years, demand for speciality cheese production has allowed the industry to more than double in size; but the present demand for goat milk for processing far exceeds supply and so the potential for manufacturers to grow is constrained. The biggest limitation for the industry is the lack of commercially orientated dairy-goat farmers. Processors currently supply markets in Australia and overseas. While quality livestock are limited to some extent, dairy goats have been exported to Asian countries.

As with all dairy industries, producers must be highly committed to meet the daily demands for milking. A number of producers are vertically integrated up to manufacturing stages. A vast amount of information on dairy goat production is available from overseas.

Markets and marketing issues

Fresh goat milk receives from $0.60 to $0.80/L from speciality cheese and yoghurt manufacturers. Location near a manufacturer is preferred. Some businesses produce milk, manufacture goods and distribute the products to capital city markets. Some products are targeted to specific ethnic markets while others are designed for specific menus at cordon bleu restaurants and speciality food businesses. Export demand exists for goat-milk products in Europe and the USA.

Production requirements

General requirements and features of goats are discussed in detail in the chapter on mohair.

Dairy goats need improved pastures in reliable rainfall districts.

Breeds

The breeds of dairy goats are the three Swiss breeds (Saanen, British Alpine, Toggenburg), their crosses and crosses of these breeds with Anglo-Nubians. It is best to plan your purchases and...
make arrangements in advance with breeders as potential breeding goats which are surplus to breeders’ requirements will be slaughtered for meat.

**Animal husbandry**

See chapter on mohair for general husbandry for goats. Dairy goat farmers need a thorough knowledge of lactation, nutritional management and the methods for the control and prevention of diseases which affect milk production. Intending dairy-goat farmers should consider completing a dairy-cow apprenticeship. Knowledge of efficient pasture husbandry, fertiliser practices and grazing management will lead to increased productivity. Improved pasture is essential for dairy-goat production.

To maximise lactation and to reduce seasonal reductions in milk supply, it is likely that dairy goats will need supplementary feeding. Specialised equipment for milking goats includes disbudding equipment, tattoo pliers, milking, storage and transport equipment. Goats are usually mated in autumn when their fertility is at its highest but with dairy goats variations to the mating month are required to ensure a more continuous supply of milk. Dairy goat kids are hand-raised in sheds.

Farm layout, including the siting of the shed and laneways and provision for effective rotational grazing, is essential for efficient farm and labour management. Holding yards adjacent to the milking shed need to be covered and can be used as a feed pad during wet periods.

**Disease control**

The important disease control issues are discussed in the chapter on mohair. In order to ensure that dairy products meet food safety standards the withholding periods for all chemicals used in the control of diseases must be strictly adhered to. The withholding periods will be stated on the package in which the chemicals are sold.

Efforts are being made to eliminate Johnes Disease and **CAE (Caprine retrovirus)** from dairy goats. Potential purchasers of goats should avoid purchasing goats exposed to these diseases.

**About the author**

Bruce McGregor is a Senior Animal Scientist whose extensive research and advisory programs in the Australian goat industries have developed scientifically based practical management and nutrition recommendations for non-tropical regions of Australia.

**Harvesting, handling and marketing requirements**

Dairy goats are milked with modern milking machinery designed and adjusted for goats. Specific modifications relate to the teat size, operating vacuum, and pulsating settings. Efficient milking shed designs are available with design principles being very similar to modern cow dairies. Milking-shed practice and hygiene must be at the highest level to avoid contamination. Detailed technical information is available. Milk must be stored under refrigeration once it...
has been harvested and prompt processing is essential. Dairy goats are usually milked twice daily and supplementary feeding of energy supplements is common at milking. Proximity to a manufacturing works will facilitate regular milk collections and reduce transport costs. Testing the quality of goat milk will ensure that standards are met and provide information to improve production practices.

Typical lactations last for 300 days and herd averages range from 2 to 3 L/ doe/day. At the peak of lactation, average production may reach 3.5 to 4 L/ doe/day. The average herd produces about 700 L/ doe/ lactation.

**Meat production.** Dairy goats, particularly culled male kids, are commonly sold for meat production. The chapter on goat meat gives details of meat production requirement, markets and production issues.

**Economics of production**

Information on large-scale economic production of dairy goats in Australia is not available. Data are taken from a new development project in Victoria with two expanding dairy-goat farms. These farms were producing about 3800 L/ha and the gross margin was $0.34 to 0.46/L. The economic return depends on the scale of operation with about 250 does being recommended.

Many dairy-goat farmers have had to start with lower numbers and build up their herds and their experience. However, in the early stages relatively small quantities of milk may not be marketable and so proximity to existing manufacturers and high quality standards would be advised. It is possible to run dairy-goat enterprises intensively without grazing, incurring feed costs of about $1/ doe/day.

Gross margin data for capretto production is given in the chapter on goat meat.

**Key contacts**

Dairy Industry:
NSW, Goat Milk Producers Association
c/- Ted Byers
Phone: (02) 9826 1371

NT, Mrs. D. Cross
Phone: (02) 9826 1371

Qld, Dairy Goat Society
c/- Tom Byrne
Phone: (07) 5546 3698

SA, Dairy Goat Society
c/- Miss L. Schmidt
Phone: (08) 5645 020

Tas, Ms. Lorraine Mance
Phone: (03) 6396 3361

Vic, Herd Improvement & Producers Association
c/- Gaille Abud
Phone: (03) 9718 2041

WA, Dairy Goat Society
c/- Tinsley Beck
Phone: (09) 574 7169

Contact your local Department of Agriculture dairy specialist, dairy discussion group or dairy consultant for local information.

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**Key messages**

- Established small industry with commercial markets
- Domestic markets want more product
- International markets want more product
- Large knowledge base available from overseas
- Requires skilled management

**Key references**


Industry Journals:
The *Australian Goat Report* published fortnightly and The *Goat Farmer* magazine, phone: (045) 761 218.