Opportunities and Challenges for Developing the Small Ruminant Industry

Fidelis Okpebholo
Virginia State University
Petersburg, VA 23834
804-524-5662
fokpebholo@vsu.edu
Introduction

- Small ruminant, specifically meat goat enterprise is currently one of the fastest growing agricultural enterprises in the United States.

- Growth has created opportunities for small and limited-resource farmers looking for a viable and profitable alternative enterprise to integrate into their traditional production systems.

- There are also challenges that plague the industry.
Opportunities

Factors that create opportunities

- High demand for goat meat
- Low start up cost
- Use of goats for brush and weed control
- Multi-species grazing
- Easy care animal
- Prolificacy of goats
Challenges plaguing the industry:

- Marketing
- Control of internal parasites
- Limited expertise information
- Limited access to credit facilities
Opportunities

High Demand

- Demand for goat meat is high and will continue to increase
  - Import increased by 329% from 1999-2006
  - Domestic production represents only 40% of what is currently consumed in the United State

- Increase in the number of immigrants from countries that consume goat meat regularly

- Emerging health conscious segment of the population looking for alternative meats for health reasons.
Opportunities

- **Low Start-up cost**
  - Land need is comparatively small
  - Goats can do well on low quality forage
  - Meat goat production does not need expensive structures or special equipment
  - Start-up stock is inexpensive compared to cattle
Opportunities

- **Use of Goats for Brush and weed control**
  - Goats are suitable for vegetation management
  - Goats can eat variety of plants that are toxic to other animals
  - Can be used to control weeds.
Opportunities

- Multi-Species Grazing
  - Goats integrate well with other animals
Opportunities

- Easy Care Animal
  - Very friendly
  - Easy to handle
Opportunities

- Prolificacy of Goats
  - Can kid three times in two years
  - High twinning rate
Challenges

- Marketing meat Goat
  - Not organized and very erratic
  - Weak link between producers and consumers
  - Not enough government approved processing plants
  - How to satisfy the emerging mainstream consumers looking for goat meat for health reasons
Challenges

Control of Internal Parasites

- Most serious problem that challenges the small ruminant industry
- Worms have developed resistance to available anthelmantics
- No vaccine discovered yet
Challenges

- Limited Expertise Information
  - Statistics
  - Feeding regimes
  - Herd health program
  - Marketing
Challenges

- Limited Access to Credit Facilities
  - Lenders are skeptical
  - Reason: Little or no available information for them to determine its profitability
Conclusion

- With the existing market from ethnic groups and the potential market from health conscious mainstream consumers, the demand for goat meat will continue to increase.

- This demand coupled with other factors has made meat goat enterprise a viable and profitable alternative to revive or upgrade small-scale farms.

- Challenges such as marketing, internal parasite control and a few others pose problems for the industry.

- These challenges have to be addressed for the meat goat industry to get to its potential level as one of the main livestock production systems in the United States.
Thank You

References:


- NASS report (2007)