

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GOAT

BRITISH GOAT SOCIETY INFORMATION LEAFLET

Firstly, the goat is one of the most useful and efficient food producing animals known to man. In this country the majority of goats are kept for their milk and the produce that can be made from it, but there is an increasing demand for meat and fibre goats. Goats can also work in harness or as pack animals.

The goat will adapt herself to many conditions, as has been proved throughout the world, and is amenable to differing systems of management. Free range, with access to good grazing and shrubby undergrowth, with adequate shelter provided is ideal. Dairy goats are usually housed at night and through most of the winter. Other breeds must have access to shelter at all times. If space is limited goats can be kept stall fed, with roughage and other food transported to them, exercise being limited to a yard or supervised walks. On a commercial scale goats can be kept communally in large airy modern farm buildings. They can graze or be stall fed. Goats are browsers rather than grazers and trees will need to be protected.

Grazing can provide sufficient nutrients through April, May and June but good quality hay should be provided all year round as roughage is essential for the efficient functioning of the rumen (the first stomach of a ruminant). Milking goats (whether being milked or rearing kids), pregnant females, growing youngstock and working males will need to be fed concentrated feed in addition. Most corn merchants can provide bags of goat mix: the quantity fed will depend on the size and yield of the goat. Additional feeds such as sugar beet, dried grass and Alfa-A etc are also available. Much clean household waste, greens and roots can also be fed.

Clean drinking water is essential: all drinking troughs, buckets and holders used for feeding must be kept clean.

Goat housing must provide protection from wind and rain. There should be good ventilation but the goat must be able to sit free from draughts. A solid floor that can be washed out is an asset and a good bed of straw should be provided.



Dairy goats require milking twice a day, seven days a week, and unless you accept this responsibility you should not keep a dairy goat. Yields vary from one litre (two pints) a day to nine litres a day, and much depends on the breeding, for if the animal does not have the milking potential bred into it no extra feeding will produce results. The highest yields are generally given between four and 12 weeks after kidding with the winter production approximately half that given during the summer months. Suitably bred goats will 'run through' or give milk in the second year after kidding at slightly reduced quantities.

Fibre goats (Angora and Cashmere), meat goats (Boer), and Pygmies usually are left to suckle their own kids, but even so, the udder should be handled daily. Goats with one kid may have an excess of milk, those with multiple kids may not have enough. Angora goats will need shearing twice a year. All goats should be attended at least twice a day, to refill hayracks and provide fresh water. Routine tasks such as foot trimming (monthly), worming (one to six monthly depending on management system), and vaccinating (four to six monthly) need to be carried out.

Dairy goats are usually not mated until they are 18 months of age, although in commercial herds they may be mated younger. Some of the other breeds are mated in their first autumn but many breeders like to wait until their second year. Goats usually come into season in the autumn and kid in the spring. The average gestation period is 150 days. Male kids are very precocious and have been known to give effective service as young as three months.

Pedigree goats should be registered. Dairy goats are registered with the British Goat Society. Angoras, Cashmere, Boer, English and Pygmies are registered with their respective breed societies. All goats should have an identification mark. This identification mark is generally an eartag which must be inserted by the breeder of the goat. The identification mark comprises the herd number (six digit number) and a unique number for each animal. All registered goats should have a registration card. Registered goats will cost more but this is well worth the additional cost as it is possible to trace the pedigree back for many generations and providing the goat is mated to a registered male the progeny will fetch a higher premium.

A wide variety of literature is obtainable from the British Goat Society and you are advised to study this before purchasing. Try to visit an agricultural show where there is a goat section or arrange to visit an established breeder in your area.

Membership of the British Goat Society includes registration of stock at reduced rates, a Herd Book, Year Book and 11 Journals which are issued throughout the year. The Journal contains many useful articles, the latest news and updates on current legislation.

There is also a host of information on the British Goat Society website www.allgoats.com including information about the various breeds of goats, links to Defra, goat health and membership forms.

Useful Website:

British Goat Society www.allgoats.com

Government Agricultural Websites

England

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm>

Scotland

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture>

Northern Ireland <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/fisheries-farming-and-food.htm>

EIRE

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/>

Ear Tag manufacturers

Dalton Livestock: www.dalton.co.uk

Symtag: www.symtag.co.uk

Allflex: www.allflex.co.uk

Fearing: www.fearing.co.uk

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