

RAISING SHEEP & GOATS IN THE SOUTHEAST

In recent years, the number of goats and sheep has increased in southeastern states, but farmers in the region face many challenges.

Parasites, poor nutrition, and breeds that are not well suited to the climate can lead to huge losses, making it hard to meet growing demand for sheep and goat meat and dairy products.

Scientists at land-grant universities are working together to find ways to make production more sustainable in the southeastern U.S. Over the past five years, research-based information has helped sheep and goat farmers make informed decisions and adopt better practices. Better management has resulted in healthier animals, fewer losses, lower costs, increased productivity, higher profits, and greater sustainability. For example, producers who received training have improved their pasture conditions.

Better pastures not only supply animal nutrition and performance year-round, but also enhance the soil and reduce the use of chemical weed killers and fertilizers. In these ways, better pasture management decreases costs and minimizes the environmental impacts. Reducing the need for expensive chemicals especially increases the sustainability and profitability of small family farms and organic farms. Research has also shed light on diet supplements and genes that can help control gastrointestinal worms, giving farmers viable, cost-effective alternatives to chemicals, which have become less effective over the years. Altogether, these improvements will help local farmers provide a stable supply of high-quality sheep and goat products to consumers.



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Workshops, events, and certification programs:

- Provided knowledge to help farmers begin and sustain healthy, profitable goat and sheep farms (*UAPB, DSU, FVSU, Langston University, LSU, UMES, Tuskegee University, USDA-ARS*)
- Demonstrated artificial insemination techniques and benefits (*Tuskegee University, USDA-ARS, VSU*)
- Convinced community members to shop for and cook local lamb products at home (*VSU*)



Researchers identified ways to improve pasture conditions while cutting expenses and environmental impacts:

- Growing clovers in pastures could reduce the need for chemical fertilizer (*NCSU*)
- New ways to biologically control unwanted vegetation in pastures allow farmers to use less herbicide (*UMES*)



Studies on feed supplements suggest that:

- Soy hulls can improve growth and reduce the time it takes for pastured lambs to reach a marketable weight (*VSU*)
- *Sericea lespedeza* pellets can help manage gastrointestinal worms and boost yearling goat health (*FVSU, USDA-ARS*)
- Probiotics can fight gastrointestinal parasites, reduce anemia, and improve body weight (*NC A&T*)
- Other ways to control parasites include eprinomectin, pine bark, and gel caps containing copper oxide particles (*LSU, UMD, NC A&T, Tuskegee University*)



Research on goat and sheep breeding:

- Provided reliable estimates of the likelihood that certain goats and sheep will pass on desirable traits to their offspring (*KSU, USDA-ARS*)
- Suggests buck performance test programs help goat farmers select top sires for breeding (*Auburn University, UMD*)
- Found that Boer goats are not suited for pasture-based, low-input farms in Alabama (*Tuskegee University*)
- Showed farmers which lamb breeds will perform well if they are grazed on fescue pastures in winter as an alternative to costly, labor-intensive hay feeding (*VSU*)
- Identified immune system factors related to parasite resistance in sheep (*WVU*)
- Determined local hair sheep are more parasite resilient than non-native breeds in the U.S. Virgin Islands (*UVI*)



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