EXPORT POTENTIAL, MARKET OUTLOOK, AND VALUE-ADDED PROCESSING OF GOAT FIBER PRODUCTS

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Introduction

Dr. Joe David Ross, manager of the Cashmere America Co-Operative, is our featured speaker for export potential, market outlook, and value-added processing of fiber goat products. Cashmere America Cooperative was started in 1991 by a small group of dedicated cashmere producers. Cashmere America Cooperative recognizes that consistency in quality makes for a premium finished product. That is just one of the reasons dedicated growers all across America joined together in the Co-op to establish high and consistent grading standards for their fiber. Dr. Ross is the owner of Ross Builta Farm in Sonora, Texas. Recently, Ross Builta Farm received the 2002 Outstanding Forage Producer award from the Texas Forage and Grassland Council.

From http://www.carylldesigns.com/cashmere_america.htm

Cashmere America's Story

"Cashmere America Cooperative is owned and operated by those in America raising the Cashmere producing goats. It is an organization set up for the purpose of processing and marketing American Cashmere.

Started in 1991 by a small group of dedicated farmers and ranchers in Colorado and Texas, the Co-Op has since grown to include farms from Maine to Washington, and from Canada to New Mexico. Cashmere goats have found their niches in America, from pasture management and weed control to providers of meat in specialty markets, to 4H youth projects, and especially as a source of one of the most luxurious fibers in the world, with American Cashmere the rarest.

As an organization, Cashmere America Cooperative recognizes that consistence in quality makes for a premium finished product. That is just one of the reasons dedicated growers all across America have joined together in the Co-Op to establish high and consistent grading standards for their fiber.

The word "cashmere" does not describe a breed, it defines the fiber. Cashmere is the downy undercoat of goats. With careful selection for fiber traits, many types of goats including dairy breeds and pygmy goats can be used in cashmere development programs. Cashmere is expensive partially because its remarkable softness and warmth place it among the world's great luxuries and partially
because the goat to garment process is complicated and expensive. While sheep and mohair goats produce pounds of fleece, a cashmere goat's annual output is calculated in ounces. To create a world-class product, each fleece must be classed by color, fiber length, and fineness, then the cashmere down must be separated from the coarse guard hair which surrounds it. The de-hairing must be complete but gentle so that the delicate fibers are not damaged. Because of the small size of individual American cashmere herds, pooling fiber is a logical method of creating useable products from raw fleece. Cashmere America is the national grower's cooperative which makes it happen. With experienced fiber classifiers on staff and access to the world's most sophisticated de-hairing equipment, Cashmere America can ensure that the cashmere which reaches the user is a product of consistently high quality, handled professionally throughout the production process.

We hope you will notice our care in the garments you make from our yarns."

Caring for Cashmere

"The key to caring for handmade Cashmere treasures is in the hand washing, using the SAME water temperature in the wash as well as in the rinse. You may use a Hot with a Hot, a Warm with a Warm, a Cool with a Cool...do not change water temperatures mid-process.

Mild soaps are recommended such as Dawn or Ivory. Gently swirl the garment through the water, carefully press the water out, then roll in a towel, give a quick shake or two to remove wrinkles, and lay flat to dry.

Like wool, Cashmere is also a favorite of moths. Protect your garment with herbed moth repellants or store in a secure environment."

From http://www.capcas.com/Cashmere_Characteristics.html

Cashmere Characteristics

The cashmere goat is a member of the species Capra hircus, as are all goats. A cashmere goat is one that produces commercial quantities of cashmere, but a "cashmere" goat cannot now be characterized as "PUREBRED" or even "REGISTERED", as those terms imply the presence of a Herd Book that records the progression of a "line." Because environment plays such a major role in determining the quality of the cashmere produced, it is very difficult to identify truly superior genetics. And even when you find a superior goat, it may or may not produce superior offspring, which is what registering a purebred animal is all about. The quality of the offspring may vary widely; some may be excellent while the twin brother is a cull. For this reason, there is no way to "GUARANTEE" the quality of a cashmere goat. You must be willing to learn how to sort through your kid crop every year and cull accordingly. Luckily, this results in more animals sold to the meat market or the weed control market, a lucrative proposition. Expect to cull half of your doe kid crop and 80% of your buck kid crop. Expect to rely upon your own judgment to decide which is which. It is very important to associate yourself with more than one mentor as there are still many opinions
out there which are in cases, diametrically opposed.

Cashmere Goats can be characterized as follows: "A cashmere goat is one which produces a fine undercoat of any commercially acceptable color and length. This down should be less than 19 microns (µ) in diameter, crimped as opposed to straight, non-medullated (not hollow) and low in luster. It should have a clear distinction between the coarse, outer guard hair and the fine underdown and should have good handle and style.” CaPrA, Concerning Cashmere, 1989

Fiber color ranges from deep brown to white, with most of the intermediate colors falling into the grey category. Color of the guard hair is not a factor when assessing cashmere fiber color, but guard hair colors that vary wildly (such as pintos) can make sorting the fiber difficult. Any length over 1¼ (30mm) after shearing is acceptable. Shearing will reduce the length of the fiber by at least 1/4” if done correctly, more if the hated "second cut" occurs. After processing, the longer fibers (over 70mm) go to spinners for manufacture into fine, soft yarns, and the shorter fibers (50-55mm) to the weaving trade to be blended with cotton, silk, or wool to produce a superior quality woven fabric. A single fleece may contain some long fibers, usually grown on the neck and midside, as well as some shorter fibers, present on the rump and belly. Also, quality of fiber usually improves with distance from the usually coarser neck; midside fiber is usually the best, with rump fiber being finer, crimpier and, unfortunately, shorter, although some goats have coarser rumps. All of these different types of fiber contained within a single raw fleece must be carefully sorted. The price of these differing types varies from $40/lb to $7.50 a pound of dehaired fiber, so sorting must be done carefully by experienced personnel. There is no way to estimate the dollar yield from a raw fleece by just taking a glance. Processing the fiber to separate the guard hairs also removes some of the down and you will not be paid for down lost in processing.

Fiber character, or style, refers to the natural crimp of each individual fiber and results from the microscopic structure of each fiber. The more frequent the crimps, the finer the spun yarn can be and therefore the softer the finished product. "Handle" refers to the feel or "hand" of the finished product. Finer fiber generally has better crimp, although this is not necessarily so. It is very easy for the human eye to be deceived by a well crimped, but coarser fiber. For this reason, estimating micron diameter is best left to the fiber testing experts. Very fine fiber which lacks the requisite crimp should not be categorized as quality cashmere. It is the crimp of quality cashmere fiber that allows the fiber to interlock during processing. This in turn allows it to be spun into a very fine, usually two-ply yarn, which remains lightweight yet retains the loft (tiny air spaces trapped between the individual fibers) that characterizes quality cashmere sweaters. This loft retains heat and is what makes cashmere different from wool, mohair and especially, man-made fibers.

Income Potential

Goats are wonderfully resourceful animals. They are very efficient feeders, converting rough browse and at times, noxious weeds into marketable products. If the manager can learn how to take advantage of the goats' natural abilities, they can use a low cost, low maintenance farm animal to add to the bottom line.
First, it is very easy to use goats to maximize range utilization on marginal land. If your land is choked with leafy spurge, for example, goats will thrive there and control the spurge. It is important to differentiate between the word "control" and the word "eradicate". Goats will not eradicate spurge. But they will happily feast upon it and prevent it from reproducing sexually. They also slow down asexual reproduction of the spurge by continuously taxing the plant by nibbling away at its above ground parts. As the spurge expends energy to regrow its above ground parts, it cannot put as much energy into its below ground parts. Hence, it can be said to be controlled.

Meat market sales are the most significant portion of cashmere goat income sources. Fat wethers will sell for $1 a pound on the hoof in the right markets. Putting pen to paper, if five or six goats are equal to one cow in terms of how much they eat every year then it can be said that 5.5 goats + 1 cow. One cow will have one calf every year and that calf is worth maybe $500 at the end of the season (in a good year). Five and a half goats will have 11 kids and those kids are worth $80 each at the end of the season. The math comes out to $880 gross income from the goats, but you need to subtract for some kid mortality and also for the cost of transporting those kids to a market which may not be very close. But the potential is there!! Add the fact that cattle and goats will choose to use different parts of your rangeland and things start to make sense... dollars and cents.

The best way to make money from this industry is to value add the fabulous fiber that these goats produce. If you are a handspinner or weaver, the products made from cashmere will be worth a lot more than the raw fiber. Enough even to pay for your time in making the items. If this is something you enjoy or if you have an entrepreneurial underpinning yearning to be free, goats are the way to go.

From http://www.texascashmere.com/four%20fold%20advantage.htm

The Four-Fold Advantage - Raising Cashmere Goats Provides Four Income Opportunities

Breeding Stock: Cashmere goats are in high demand and will continue to be as small farms look for alternative means to provide income on their farms. The cashmere industry in the United States is relatively new and there is still tremendous opportunity to improve upon cashmere genetics and develop first class animals for sale.

Cashmere Fiber: The fiber arts are enjoying a tremendous resurgence in the United States; knitting, hand spinning, and weaving. This year you may have already noticed that many popular clothing catalogs have entire sections devoted specifically to cashmere garments. This attention and rapid resurgence in popularity will do your marketing for you.

Meat Goat Sales: Goat meat is the most eaten meat in the world. Goats are able to survive in lands where other livestock cannot and are therefore a staple in the diets of huge portions of the world’s population. The cultural make-up of the United States is rapidly changing with Ethnic populations making up a greater and greater part of our society. Many of these cultures are accustomed to eating goat meat and not only prefer it, but are required to serve it during sacred
meals. As a result, the demand for goat meat in much of the country currently outweighs the supply.

These Cashmere goats are stocky, well muscled and make an excellent meat goat. Considering Boer goats? The breeders in our region tell us that they get their best meat goats from a Boer/Spanish cross. These cashmere-producing Spanish Meat Goats offer versatility if you want to take advantage of the rapidly growing meat market.

Brush Clearing: Goats are browsers and are able to eat plants that other animals do not. They often prefer “weeds” and thistles to grass. Goats are able to rid pastures of many unwanted species of plants including; multi-flora rose, autumn olive, leafy spurge, and many others. A herd of goats can make short work of clearing your pastures and may provide you with the opportunity to sell, or even rent goats to neighbors to clear their land and pastures. Furthermore, goats make excellent grazing companions to cattle, as they will eat unwanted, competitive plant species, allowing for diversity in your pastures and a potential increase in cattle forage.

Cashmere producing goats are an excellent alternative for small farmers who want to make the best use of their land. These goats are not “exotics” but rather an important part of the new agriculture to meet the already established demands of a new marketplace. They just so happen to also grow the most luxurious fiber in the world! If you were already considering goats for your farm, consider the versatility of the Cashmere goat.
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