I would like to welcome all of you here to Langston University and thank you for your interest in the meat goat industry. One question often asked is “what is a meat goat”? My common reply to that query is “any goat that doesn’t die on a farm or ranch eventually ends up on someone’s plate”. Thusly any and all breeds of goats represent a meat goat as muscle or meat is their main structural component.

For those of you new in the business with little or no experience with goats, don’t worry because goats have had a lot of experience with mankind. As a matter of fact, when it comes to length of time since their domestication, they are second only to dogs. Since dogs aren’t generally considered food animals, this makes goats which were domesticated approximately 12,000 years ago, our oldest food producing domestic livestock. The goats not only provided a source of readily available protein in the form of meat, but also in milk and clothing in the form of fiber and pelts for our forebears; much as they are still doing today 120 centuries later. One other thing that probably peaked early interest in goats and is still prevalent is their respective short reproductive cycle and subsequent ease of breed development. High reproductive rates also help in this regard as multiple offspring aren’t uncommon in any breed of goat.

The durability and hardiness of these animals can be attested to when you look at the Spanish goats’ history; one of several meat breeds here in the U.S. The Spanish goat is a very hardy animal which developed largely on it’s own, without human intervention; at least in Texas. Spanish explorers who entered in the early 1500’s had brought their portable cows, i.e. goats with them on the boat and their escape or intentional release led to small herds of wild goats in Texas, thus the name Spanish goats was given to these animals.

Early Texas settlers, recognizing this valuable resource, captured and re-domesticated them; much as was done with the longhorn cattle breed which also originated with these early Spanish explorers.

There was for many, many years though the lack of a structured breeding and marketing plan, largely due to lack of a demand for goat meat. One of the main reasons being our European ancestry. While goat has been and still is the most widely consumed meat world wide, (approximately 63% of the red meat consumed world wide is goat meat) our European ancestors (early American settlers) were and still are traditionally beef eaters. This limited the market
demand for goat domestically and so there was no real economic incentive for breed development, such as there was early on in the cattle business. Goat meat consumption here in the U.S. for a great many years was limited mainly to the more Southern and Western states where the animals were marketed and consumed locally. I guess you could say goat cookery was one of the best kept secrets of the West and today we pay the price in lack of product recognition.

The U.S.A. though has long been called the great melting pot due to its policy of allowing immigration from any country in the world. This has led to an influx of persons in whose cultures and countries chevon was and is regularly consumed. While these immigrants for the most part have Americanized their diet, on occasion they long for a taste of home cooking. Often this means they want to put some goat on the table, most notably on certain cultural and religious holidays traditionally celebrated in their home countries. These new Americans are currently the main driving force in the developing meat goat industry here in the U.S.A. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when demand started increasing to the point of creating market awareness, but I’d hazard a guess that it was as recent as the late 1950’s - early 1960’s here in this country. There were however very few producers who concentrated on raising meat goats. While there was a market developing, not very many ranchers and farmers recognized the growing opportunities and therefore meat goats continued to be raised and marketed in a really haphazard fashion. Could you imagine having to go out and buy a steer on the hoof, slaughter and process it yourself each time you wanted to eat beef? I feel the beef industry would never have developed into the agricultural giant it is today had this been the case. This is however, the limbo that the meat goat industry existed in for many, many years.

Now we’ll fast forward to more recent times. In 1992 the American Meat Goat Association was formed due to the foresight of a few West Texas Ranchers; namely Mr. & Mrs. Tom Carter and Mr. & Mrs. Stan Keene. The purposes of this producer oriented organization were designated as follows:

**OBJECTIVE**: “The purpose of this Association shall be to promote meat goats as a viable source of long-term, stable income in agricultural operations; to establish group breeding plans for the improvement of meat goats; and to enhance consumer demand at the retail level.”

**GOALS**:  
1. Educate the general public about the role and uses of meat goats in American agriculture.  
2. Promote environmentally responsible uses of grazing land.  
3. Explore long-term markets at home and abroad.  
4. Encourage and help facilitate direct marketing strategies by the producer.  
5. Promote goat meat in the supermarket by helping to facilitate the development of high quality, lean, value-added products.  
6. Promote goat meat as an acceptable meat product from both a cuisine and health aspect in restaurants and hotels.  
7. Promote and encourage meat goats as a recognized class in 4-H and F.F.A. livestock shows.  
8. Establish uniformity in meat goat judging by providing a list of available
AMGA certified meat goat judges.

9. Provide educational information on the principles of selection for increased reproduction and weight gain.

10. Offer opportunities for the purchase of high quality breeding stock through Association sanctioned sales.

While we here at the AMGA have certainly met and achieved some of these goals, we’re still working on those we haven’t yet accomplished. Please bear with us because even though we’ve made great strides to date there’s still a lot of work left to do and we’re staying on top of it.

One year after the formation of the AMGA the meat goat industry here in the U.S. received its biggest single boost to date. This was the importation in 1993 of the South African developed breed of goat known as the Boer goat; the name being derived from the Afrikaans word “Boer” which means farmer. The Boer is a strictly defined meat producing breed of goat bred and is renowned world wide for its large size, heavy muscling, and the fast weight gains of its purebred and cross bred offspring. These importations not only jump started our industry but quite probably saved us from ourselves. Never before this time had concerted efforts been made, except by a few select breeders, to improve our native animals.

With Boer goats selling in late 1993 and early 1994 in the 10’s of thousands of dollars, owning goats overnight became fashionable and most importantly respectable. After 450 years here in the U.S. ownership of goats, an important meat producing animal around the planet, has become socially acceptable here in our home country. Suddenly a whole new class of goat farmers emerged on the agricultural scene; persons who in the past wouldn’t have owned a “damn tin can eating goat“ prior to the introduction of Boers here in this country.

The two greatest things the Boer has done for the industry is first, saves us about 40 years of breeding which would have been necessary to develop our own “Farmers Goat”, and secondly on this list but not necessarily in importance is all the goat related research this new interest spawned. Not only do we have people who were never before interest going goats we have the attention of the Academia across the U.S. with Universities such as Langston University in Oklahoma, Fort Valley State University in Georgia, Southern Louisiana University in Louisiana, Virginia State University in Virginia, and Texas A & M University in Texas the more active ones that I’m aware of; and others I’m sure I’ve missed, currently engaged in all phases of goat research. Which has been of great benefit to all of us up to today and will continue to benefit us for many years to come.

Goats have also spread across the U.S. to many areas where they were never before raised as their numbers have increased and so has U.S.D.A. interest in the meat goat industry; and so another link is added to the chain. The U.S. goat population is certainly more widespread than in the past while total numbers here have increased in recent years the percentage of this population which is located in Texas has decreased from 90% in the 1980’s to 65%-70% as of today; this is really great for us as a whole. While it might have been easy to ignore a small, basically one state industry in the past, it is becoming very hard for the powers that be to ignore this new and
growing nationwide meat goat industry. The most recent development that will certainly have a
great impact is the U.S.D.A./A.M.S. development and release of IMPS or Institutional Meat
Purchasing Specification draft for public comment in relation to goat meat. This document not
only defines the classes and grades, but also the primal cuts to be sold with distinct and exact
wording. This very important document was officially released for a sixty day public comment
period on March 15, 2000 and finally gives us a universal description for our product. To put it
in perspective, could you imagine telling someone to “buy me a car” with no further instructions
issued? What kind of car would you soon be the proud owner of, new or five years old, what
size, what make, etc., the possibilities are endless. Thankfully as soon as the final IMPS plan is
approved, we in the meat goat industry will no longer be in that position. In the near future when
a buyer wants to buy goat meat her or she can be assured of exactly what they’re ordering, thanks
to all who worked on IMPS development. I’m not naming individuals to avoid inadvertent
deletion of some of these important and dedicated people but they do command our gratitude
because of their hard work on our behalf.

This industry shows no signs of weakening in years to come and that is really great. In
recent months while other phases of agriculture have experienced low crop prices, we meat goat
producers have experienced record high prices for our commodity. We all need to make an effort
to protect our newly discovered and I dare say infant meat goat industry. Don’t think for a
moment that the other giant agricultural nations around the world aren’t aware of the growing
market for goat meat here in the good old U.S.A. Imports from Australia and New Zealand
currently account for approximately 60% of the goat meat sold here in the United States. While
these imports are not currently having a negative impact on our domestic market, let us not be
disillusioned into thinking they can’t hurt us by lowering the price we as producers receive at the
farm gate. We stand poised and ready at the gateway to a whole new industry and we really don’t
need unfettered competition damaging us by driving domestic prices down.

Last year in July I was fortunate enough to be able to represent our industry at the World
Trade Organization hearing which was held in preparation for the upcoming WTO talks in
thought the A.M.G.A. important enough to issue an invitation to testify at this class of hearing
certainly filled me with no small measure of pride. Just to think that meat goat producers
through the A.M.G.A. were allowed the same venue to get our point out in regard to international
trade as were the true giants of American agricultural interest such as cotton, corn, dairy, peanuts,
along with all the rest of them that we know and recognize. The fact we were included assures
me our government officials know we’re here to stay and they are supporting us by their
admissions of our current contributions to the U.S. agriculture industry.

While up until now things have all been upbeat, we in the meat goat industry aren’t
without our faults. In regards to the Boer goats here in the U.S., many of us are guilty of the sin
of making them into more or less pets. We’ve taken animals bred to survive and reproduce in
poor to marginal range conditions, put them in pens and turned them into fat, lazy goats unable to
compete in a natural environment. This being the case we have done neither the goats or
ourselves any favors. I’ll admonish all of you raising Boers to give them a chance to be goats.
You might be surprised at their adaptability and hardiness. Not to mention you’ll have less
personal time tied up in them, as well as less feed and other related costs, thus increasing your bottom line. And while I’m sure there are probably some hobby farmers out there to whom profits aren’t important, they are important to me and I’m fairly sure that very few of you would express an aversion to a few extra dollars in your pocket. I’m not telling you to neglect your livestock as that would be unwise, only to let them be real goats. Take care of them to a reasonable point and they’ll reward you with many enjoyable memories and lots of baby goats; and quite probably some money in the form of profits.

Before I go any further, I’m going to admit quilt on my part to spoiling my first Boer goats particularly when I started raising them in 1993; after all what kind of idiot turns out to pasture such valuable animals as these.

The second greatest mistake and one to which I can plead innocence is that lack of support meat goat producers as a whole give to those of us working toward industry development. This is highly evident when you look at the fact that only about .6%, and no it’s not a misprint - it reads 6/10 of 1%, of goat producers are AMGA members. People you have the AMGA who is willing to go to bat for you but we need more producer support. The last U.S.D.A. Ag. Census figures released showed right at 60,000 farm and ranches across the U.S. involved in production of goats other than “Angora or Milk”; their wording. For those of you who ask “What will the AMGA do for me?” I’ll turn it around and paraphrase JFK and ask “What will you do for the AMGA?” We are here and will continue to strive for the betterment and advancement of the U.S. meat goat industry. Will you give us your support? If nothing else at least join your home states meat goat producers organization. Here it’s called the Oklahoma Meat Goat Association; easy name to remember and I’m sure they’ll be glad to have your membership. None of us and I’m speaking of all goat producer organizations can function without your help, support, and membership. The fact that large numbers of producers involvement is missing in this industry is no secret to our bureaucrats. U.S.D.A. funding for any large scale goat related projects is notably absent this year, 2000. In a letter I received from an insider it was stated and I quote “this is due I suspect to lack of self help by the goat industry”. In other words, if we won’t help ourselves they’re not going to help us either. Right now we’ve got momentum, recognition, respectability, and profitability in our chosen industry and we can’t afford to lose any of these positives. This is no time to adopt a wait and see or apathetic attitude towards the goat industry. If we continue our present growth rate in the meat goat industry I can only imagine the size of this thing eight years from now. It will be truly astounding!!
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