

Developing a Goat Meat Market in the Black Hills of South Dakota

The Newsletter
of the NCR-SARE
Program

Summer 2016
Issue 34

Goat production is a growing enterprise for small-scale and limited resource farmers. Goats can adapt to different production systems and can be raised with relatively few inputs, but they can present production and marketing challenges.

Susan and Tom Barnes live on 120 acres along Pleasant Valley, southwest of Custer, South Dakota. Susan's family homesteaded much of Pleasant Valley, and made a living raising cattle and horses for more than one hundred years. Today, Susan and Tom continue that tradition by raising goats. They maintain Savannah, Spanish, and Boer herds for their cross breeding program.

In 2012, the Barneses received an NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher grant to work on the development of a chevon (goat meat) market in the Black Hills region and educate consumers and producers about meat goats. During the project, they conducted a feeding study and carcass evaluation, visited meat markets, restaurants, and meat processors, conducted taste tests, and developed marketing materials to expand consumer and producer awareness about goat meat.

"This project was extremely interesting because of all its moving parts," said Tom Barnes. "We live in an area where cattle are the main protein source, so to get people to eat and then buy goat is a challenge. We knew that goats are browsers/grazers, which fits well with the Black Hills. There are many small acreages that will not support cattle, but where small ruminants are well suited. We also know that goat meat is very healthy compared to many of the mainstream meats. We emphasized these points."

When the feeding study portion of the grant was completed, they took eight selected goats to a USDA federally inspected facility and had the carcasses evaluated by an experienced meat specialist. They used full blood bucks from each breed to track genetics, and they implemented a cross-breeding program in

order to reduce kid mortality, improve herd health, and maintain high quality meat.

In order to connect with consumers, they served samples at several public events, as well as eight private dinners. They served between 500 and 600 people during the grant period and received 219 feedback surveys. They learned that most people had not cooked goat meat before, most people did not know that about the nutritional value of goat meat, most said that if goat meat were available they would prepare it on occasion, and most would benefit from recipes and preparation instructions.

The Barneses also ran ten small ads in the regional newspaper. Five ads focused on eating goat meat and five ads focused on raising goats as a profitable livestock animal. As a result of the ads, they received more than 40 telephone inquiries. The ads also led to a front-page local newspaper article about their SARE grant and Pleasant Valley Farm.

Pleasant Valley Farm has customers who order small amounts on a weekly basis or whole goats annually, and they also sell to a high-end restaurant in Rapid City. In addition to exceeding their project goal to sell or distribute 1,400 lbs. of goat meat, the Barneses expanded their market; Tom Barnes says they will sell all of their production directly in the Black Hills and will not need to use auctions.



With SARE support, Susan Barnes and her husband, Tom, are working to expand the goat meat market and goat production in the Black Hills region of South Dakota. Photo by Jean Andreasen.

"The exposure of goats to the general public through the grant has made a difference to all goat producers in our area," said Tom Barnes. "The SARE grant gave us the opportunity to build a customer base slowly, remain sustainable, and still produce quality meat. Our meat demand far outpaces our supply by at least 3 times. We have more than 30 regular private sale customers and we could be supplying five restaurants if we had the goats."

Because they are interested in helping new goat producers get started, the Barneses organized a seminar this winter to promote goat production. They had 31 attendees from four states, and it generated some new producers. They will also continue performance testing to ensure good bloodlines for sales to other breeders.

For more information on this NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher project, and to see detailed results of the feeding study and carcass evaluation, visit the SARE project reporting website at <http://mysare.sare.org> and search for project number FNC12-846.