

Chapter 1: Introduction to Florida's Meat Goat Industry

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NUMBER OF GOAT FARMS AND GOATS

Florida had 1,111 farms with goats in 1992 (Table 1.1). Of these, 975 or 88 percent did not include milk or angora goats. Virtually all of these farms, called "other" in this chapter, consisted of meat goats. There are, however, some farms in this category which raise specialized animals such as pygmies. In terms of inventory, eighty six percent of Florida's goats are in the "other" category and thus are almost all meat goats. In contrast, only 24 percent of goats in the United States are meat type. The preponderance are Angoras.

Florida had 2.79 percent of United States' farms with meat goats in 1992 (Table 1.1). The state accounted for 2.42 percent of meat goat inventory. Also, Florida had 2.95 percent of meat goat farms with sales. Quite interesting is that 39 percent of meat goat farms, 379, sold goats. This means that about 6 out of 10 producers reportedly kept goats only for their own use.

Florida is part of the southern goat industry. Evaluation of data from the 1992 Census of Agriculture indicates that 78 percent of farms with goats in the 11 southeastern states were in the "other" category (Table 1.2). In contrast, 88 percent of Florida's industry is made up of meat type goats. Texas and Oklahoma, which are the primary states with Angoras, had the lowest percentages in the "other" category. The southeastern states had 45 percent of the United States meat goats in 1992.

Although the southeastern region only had 23 percent of milk goat inventory in 1992, these states had 87 percent of the Angoras and 76 percent of the "other" category (Table 1.3). There were 2.5 million goats in the United States of which 24 percent were meat goats. Florida had nearly 17 thousand goats of which 86 percent were meat goats.

The average number of meat goats per farm ranged from 10 to 16 for the Southeastern states with the exception of Texas, which had an average of 55 goats (Table 1.4). Florida had an average of 15 meat goats per farm.

The number of farms with meat goats in the United States increased 19 percent between 1987 and

1992 (Table 1.5). The national inventory of meat goats increased 42 percent. Farms with meat goat sales grew 25 percent while the number of meat goats sold increased 31 percent. There was a slight increase in the number of farms with sales of goats, from 36 to 38 percent of all farms with goats.

Hillsborough county had 81 farms with goats in 1992 making it first in Florida (Appendix 1.1). Second was Marion county with 68 farms while Alachua county ranked third with 58 farms. The ranking remains the same when milk and angora goats are excluded (Appendix 1.2). Hillsborough county is first, with 76 farms.

The largest number of goats, 1,691 head was found in Alachua county in 1992 followed by Madison county and then Hillsborough county (Appendix 1.1). The ranking remains the same when Angora and milk goats are excluded (Appendix 1.2).

FLORIDA MEAT GOAT INDUSTRY EVOLUTION

Florida's meat goat industry has evolved over the past few decades from one in which goats were kept as a minor part of subsistence level small farm systems, into a more structured industry oriented approach. Although most meat goat producers still consider their animals as a sideline operation, others seriously view meat goats as a business.

The evolution of Florida's meat goat industry is an interesting and instructive story of interplay between demand and supply forces. On the demand side, rapid growth in ethnic populations, which have traditionally desired goat meat, has led to increased consumption. Simultaneously, development of the interstate highway system and improvement in refrigeration has provided the means by which meat from cull animals derived from the extensive Angora goat industry in Texas could be inexpensively delivered to Florida. Relatively cheap ocean freight rates have led to goat meat from Australia being imported with increasing frequency. An important aspect, found in a study by Degner, Lin and Simpson, reported on in Chapter 2, indicates that supplies have been adequate to meet the needs of the traditional market.