

Sheep & Goat Production

Mandy Fletcher, VSU Small Farm Outreach Program



Why Sheep or Goats?

- Additional Income
- Meat - sell live animals for meat or the sale of meat
- Milk - income from the sale of milk, cheese and/or other dairy products
- Fiber - wool, cashmere, etc.
- Brush control - goats are best, but sheep help also!



Choosing the Right Breed of Sheep & Goat

- What are your farm goals? Do you have a farm business plan?
- Market Lambs/Kids = Meat sheep/goats (Suffolk, Dorset, Kiko & Boar goats, etc.) & Hair sheep (Katahdin, Dorper)
- Farmer's Market and Restaurant = Meat sheep/goats & Hair sheep, Wool sheep (Merino, Rambouillet, etc.)
- Wool - fiber for wool pool (hand cleaning & baling); handmade artisan products, yarns (fiber goat - Angora, etc.)
- Dairy - milk sheep and goat breeds (East Friesian sheep & Alpine & Nubian goats)
- Breeding Stock (Seedstock) and Registered animals - sell your best lambs and kids!
- Breed Associations can provide information to help narrow choices. What breed suits my farming operation and goals?



Sheep vs. Goats

Sheep

- Grazer - close to the ground (pasture)
- Strong flocking instinct
- Grow faster
- More numbers in diversity

Goats

- Browser (brushy land)
- Curious and independent
- Grow slower
- Less numbers and diversity



Pro's of raising sheep and goats

- Pasture improvement - distribute nutrients through manure; less soil compaction than other livestock
- Stocking rate is 4-5 ewes or goats is equivalent to 1 cow (small farms)
- Small, easier to handle
- Reproductive efficiency: 5-month gestation compared to 9-11 months for other livestock
- Often have twins or multiple births- increasing profits
- Family togetherness
- Strong niche demand for products



Challenges of Raising Sheep & Goats

Requires more labor/care
than cattle and other
livestock

Lack of Knowledge

Fencing

Predators

Parasites



Time Investment & Care

- Check flock or herd daily - look for signs of problems and respond quickly
- Pasture management - results in optimal health and reduces parasite stress
- Routine vaccinations and disease prevention protocols - usually twice per year - Consult your veterinarian!
- Trimming hooves - usually twice per year or more
- Pregnancy and birthing complications - more frequent monitoring, keeping sheep and goat in a barn with good sanitation, orphan lambs or kids (bottle feeding), veterinary visit(s)



Do your homework: Gain knowledge

- Reputable sources for information: sheep and goat specialist publications, extension resources, educational workshops, join sheep and goat clubs, visit small ruminant research facilities, farm visits with other producers/verified breeders
- Start small - it's easy to grow! Learn with 5 to 20 animals
- Work budgets out on paper – Economics and profitability research
 - Beginning producers that prepare a business plan are 10-20 times more profitable than those who don't (anecdotal evidence, VCE)
 - Having a business plan is often needed to apply for loans and grant funding



**Small Ruminants:
Preparing for Winter**

October 25, 2022 · 7:30-9 pm · **FREE**
Join Us on Zoom!

Fall is often a time of rest for sheep and goat producers. The ewe and doe flock is in varying stages of pregnancy and does not require as much attention. But sound management at this time is extremely important. Proper vaccination programs, mineral supplementation, and other nutritional factors can directly affect success at lambing/kidding. Join us for an evening of learning and a Q & A session with Dr. Scott Greiner, Extension Sheep Specialist with Virginia Tech.

Register at ext.vsu.edu/calendar For more information, contact Mandy Fletcher at 804-892-0108 or mfletcher@vsu.edu.

Logos: Virginia Cooperative Extension, VSU College of Agriculture, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, USDA, FARM CREDIT, FARM BUREAU, SARE, FARMER VETERAN, ARCADIA, and Ability Virginia.

Visit ext.vsu.edu for information on this and other upcoming events.

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please call 804-524-3292 / TDD 800-828-1120 during business hours of 9 am and 5 pm to discuss accommodations five days prior to the event.

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Do your homework: Gain knowledge

- Select healthy animals - Know signs or poor-doers. Ask for production records.
- Planned breeding programs are best. Market opportunities.
- Choose good breeding males - the best ram or buck you can afford. The male has a great influence on performance because his offspring could remain in the flock for years to come. (Increases genetic improvement)
- Expect to get 5 years or more of service from a ewe or doe. If breeding replacement ewes or does, need an unrelated ram/buck



Photo: <https://goats.extension.org/goat-breeds-kiko/>

Fencing

- Woven wire - ideal for perimeter (boundary)
- High tensile electric
- Electric Netting - portable
- Still need Livestock Guardian Animals!



The screenshot shows a website interface for 'Premier'. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'All' and a search box containing 'Search Premier'. To the right of the search box is a shopping cart icon with '0 Items' and a right-pointing arrow. Below the navigation bar, the breadcrumb trail reads 'Home » Sheep » Fencing'. The main heading is 'PermaNet® (Standard & Pro) Electric Netting'. The text describes the net as a 48" net perfect for sites with installation problems, mentioning stronger PVC posts and steel spikes. It also notes it's available as a Pos/Neg fence for dry conditions. A section titled 'Common Uses' lists several applications, including keeping sheep and goats in, boundary fences for ponds and orchards, and interim boundary fences. To the right of the text is a large image of two white sheep behind a wire fence. Below this image is a carousel of smaller images showing different fencing products and a video player with the title 'New! Watch How-to Video How Electric Fence Works'.

All Search Premier 0 Items »

Home » Sheep » Fencing

PermaNet® (Standard & Pro) Electric Netting

This 48" net is perfect for sites with installation problems for permanent wire fences (hills, rocks, dips, curves, trees, no machine access). It has stronger, heavier, larger PVC posts with longer, thicker, steel spikes, supporting the net better through wind, rain, ice and snow.

It's also available as a [Pos/Neg fence](#) for dry, sandy or rocky conditions. Ideal for situations when there is too little moisture in the soil to properly ground the fence.

Common Uses

- Keep sheep, goats, pigs and cattle in and deer and bears out.
- Designed to be left in one place for months or years.
- Boundary fences for ponds, orchards, forestry plantations, gardens, cropland.
- Boundary fences on leased land. It's easy to remove when the lease ends.
- Interim boundary fence until a permanent wire fence is installed.
- To protect stored hay or grain supplies.
- Sites with soils that shift due to frost or water-table changes and therefore are difficult to maintain high wire tensions.



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New! Watch How-to Video
How Electric Fence Works

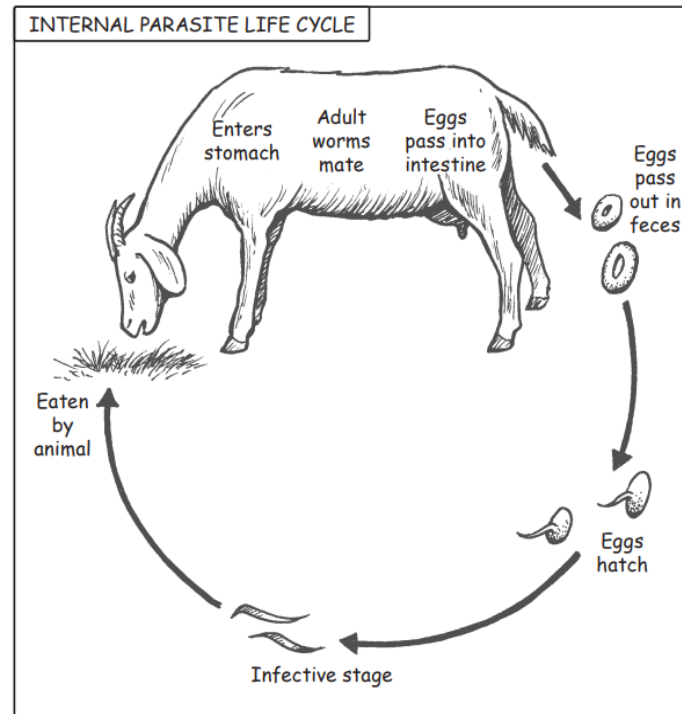
Predators & Protectors

- Coyotes, Raptor birds (hawks & eagles), Domestic Dogs, Bear, etc. : Electric fence can help discourage coyotes and stray dogs. Electric netting is also effective.
- Livestock Guardian Dogs: Great Pyrenees, Anatolian Shepherd, Maremma, Akbash, etc.
- Donkeys - Gelding or Jenny
- Llamas - Neutered Male or Female
- USDA - APHIS Wildlife Services Program - serves livestock producers suffering Predation on livestock by providing technical assistance, direct control and education.



Parasites

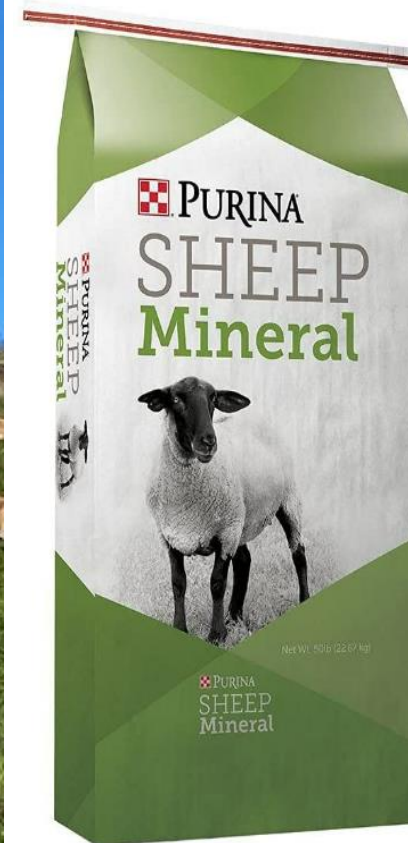
- One of the primary concerns
- Signs of possible parasitism: dirty tail, thin, anemia (check eyelids FAMACHA) - visit wormx.info for online training
- Rotational Grazing - grass height not below 2 inches
- Cull any animals that harbor high levels of parasites



Nutrition Requirements



- Water
- Energy
- Protein
- Minerals
- Vitamins



Nutrition for Small Ruminants

Nutrient Requirements

- Sheep
 - ~2%BW Dry Matter
 - Very Sensitive to Cu
 - P requirements are similar to goats but do not appear to be as sensitive
- Lambs
 - Self-feeder
 - Pellet or Textured Feed
 - 16-18% CP
 - 1.5-2.5% Fat
- Goats
 - ~3%BW Dry Matter
 - Need 2-3x Cu level
 - Very Sensitive to P (Do not exceed 0.40% on the feed tag – 0.35% is ideal)
- Kids
 - Self-feeder
 - Pelleted Feed
 - 14-16% CP
 - 2.5-3.5% Fat

Dr. Scott Greiner, VT Extension Animal Scientist & Professor





Housing

- Good shelter to protect from harsh weather conditions - don't need anything fancy!
- Good ventilation - decreases respiratory disease
- Good sanitation - clean bedding



Equipment

- Need a variety of equipment: Basics include - feeders, water tubs or watering systems, and health care equipment
- Larger operations use equipment for handling sheep or goats
- Scales - monitor animal growth performance (birth weights, weaning weights, market-ready weights, and calculate dosages of medications)



Supplies


- Small Ruminant Kit: Thermometer, Halter, Hoof trimmers, Vaccination supplies, Deworming supplies, Lambing & Kidding supplies
- Health record book or App - keep good records of health conditions & treatments- such as vaccinations, medical (medication & antibiotic treatments), dewormers, hoof care, Veterinary care, and lambing/kidding records
- Ear tags and USDA Scrapie tags - Official tags approved for use in sheep and goats with the US shield printed on the tag - Any sheep or goat that leaves your farm needs a Scrapie tag!!



Small & Beginning Sheep Farmer Spotlight



Sources & Informational Resources

- Virginia State University Small Ruminant Page
<https://www.ext.vsu.edu/small-ruminants>
- Virginia Tech Sheep Extension & Outreach
<https://www.apsc.vt.edu/extensionandoutreach/Sheep-Extension.html>
- Virginia Sheep Producers Association
- Maryland Small Ruminant Page
- American Sheep Industry (ASI)
- The American Goat Federation
- NCAT ATTRA - "An Illustrated Guide to Sheep and Goat Production" publication
- NCAT ATTRA - "Sheep and Goats: Frequently Asked Questions" by Linda Coffey
- The American Consortium for Small Ruminant Parasite Control (wormx.info)
- Penn State Extension - "So You Want to Raise Sheep or Goats?" publication
- VSU College of Agriculture - Dr. Dahlia O'Brien - "Starting a Small Ruminant Meat Enterprise" presentation 

Contact

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