

Dairy Goats

Introduction

The goat has been renowned from the earliest civilisation for its milk. There are approximately 200 farmers with a dairy goat enterprise in Ireland, with herd sizes ranging from 10 to 750. Dairy goat farming is a growth area with an increasing demand for goats' milk for cheese, yoghurt, ice-cream and liquid milk consumption. Ireland has the highest rate of asthma in Europe and the fourth highest rate in the world. 470,000 people in Ireland have asthma with as many as 20% of children suffering from the condition. An increasing number of medical practitioners are prescribing goats' milk for children who suffer from asthma, eczema and for those children unable to digest the fat in cows' milk. An increasing number of people within the ethnic population have an intolerance to the lactose in cows' milk and are consequently consuming goats' milk. At present the demand for goats' milk is not met during the winter months and to meet the shortfall we have to import goats' milk from Holland.

Establishing a Goat Herd

Before investing in a dairy goat enterprise, establish a profitable outlet for the milk. Source goats very carefully, by buying healthy animals from healthy herds. Goats are clean, friendly, inquisitive, active animals fond of companionship and very responsive. Much stress can be caused by a new owner, therefore time should be taken to get to know the animals and vice versa. Enterprises have failed because of the poor quality and performance of the foundation herd. The aim should be to achieve 1,000 litres per goat per 300 day lactation. Goats from different herds do not mix well and the resulting stress can considerably reduce their potential milk yield. It is advisable to purchase kids ranging in age from 5 to 9 months rather than adult goats.

Production

Goats are seasonal breeders and thus seasonal milk producers. The best markets for goats' milk demand an all the year round supply of milk. Some processors are at present paying 69 cent per litre all the year round based on the milk supply between October 1st and March 31st, any supply surplus to this will only achieve a price of 48 cent per litre over the summer months. It is possible to induce out of season breeding by manipulation of lights or the administration of hormones. It is possible to freeze goats' milk successfully, but most consumers of milk and cheese makers want a supply of **fresh high quality** goat's milk all the year round. As goats are extremely clean animals, there should be no problem producing high quality milk to conform to EU standards.

Training Courses in Goats

Teagasc run a 25 hour course in Dairy Goat Production each year. It is also advisable that potential goat stockpersons should work for a period in an existing well run commercial dairy goat unit system; it is easier to milk record and consequently have a better selection and breeding policy.



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This is one of a series of fact sheets on income generating activities.

All fact sheets are available in the Advisory Section of the Teagasc Website
www.teagasc.ie

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Teagasc Fact Sheets present a brief overview of a topic. Further detailed advice should always be sought from relevant sources.

Grant Aid

Goat farmers who have successfully completed a 20 hour course **may** qualify for grant aid for upgrading existing buildings and or the erection of new buildings for goat accommodation, feed and waste storage facilities under the Scheme of Investment Aid in Alternative Enterprises.

Dairy/milking premises, milking machine equipment, milk cooling, refrigeration, storage and other equipment may qualify for a 40% grant in aid, under the Scheme of Investment Aid for the Improvement of Dairy Hygiene Standards. To qualify for grant aid under these two schemes, applicants must have a minimum of 30 income units of which at least 20 must come from farming.

Establishment Costs & Profit Margins

Milk must be **cooled** immediately after milking as otherwise there would be a splitting of fatty acids which can cause taint. The type and size of milking parlour and dairy is very much dependent of the size of goat herd. Capital cost of establishment will depend on whether one can convert existing buildings or starting from a green field site.

Erecting a 12 yoke; 6 point goat milking parlour should have a throughput of 80 goats per hour with one operator.

Capital Cost (Net) of a 100 Goat Herd	€
Milking goats @ €180 each	18,000
Breeding male goats @ €200	600
Milking Parlour Equipment	14,000
Refrigerated bulk milk tank & plate cooler	10,000
Conversion of existing farm buildings	20,000
Total Capital Cost	€62,600

Output, Costs & Gross Margins from Dairy Goat Production

Performance	Average	High
Yield/Annum (Litres)	800	1000
Output	€	€
Milk @ 61c/litre	488	610
Less Replacement Cost	- 32	- 32
Total Output	456	578
Variable Costs		
Concentrates	100	132
Forage	60	60
Pasture Costs	15	15
Vet/Medicine	25	25
Miscellaneous	35	32
Total Variable Costs / Goat	235	264
Gross Margin/Goat	221	314
Fixed Costs/Goat	65	63
Net Margin/Goat	156	251

The above price of 61c per litre is based on selling directly to a processor without cartoning, pasteurising or marketing. Higher prices can be obtained by selling directly to retail outlets but this entails higher packaging and processing costs and also the producer must guarantee continuity of supply. It is necessary to identify the market to be supplied before commencing production as there are no organised markets.