

GOAT FAQs

Introduction

The image of the goat has undergone a transformation in recent years. Goats' milk has long been associated with certain health benefits and due to its chemical and physical properties, it is also much more readily

digestible by the human body. Goats' cheese, rarely found on menus 20 years ago, has become a firm favourite with the Irish palate and is now commonplace in restaurants. Yoghurts, ice cream and even cosmetics can all be made from goats' milk. Changes in the ethnic makeup of our

population, as well as an emphasis on healthy food options, have led to a demand for goat meat. Even their coats can be made into clothing and their hides in bodhráns. Their small size coupled with this huge versatility makes them suitable for even the smallest of holdings.

General

I want to get some goats, what do I do first?

In order to keep goats in Ireland you must be registered with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). If you do not currently have a herd number, you must contact your local Regional Veterinary Office for a registration form.

Once you are issued with your herd number you can order tags for your goats. You can get more information on the DAFM website: www.agriculture.gov.ie.

What are the steps required in setting up a goat herd?

1. Before investing in any goat enterprise, it is vitally important to establish a secure steady outlet for your product. Without an outlet there is little point in starting goat farming.
2. Contact your local Regional Veterinary Office regarding a herd number.



Remember goats are subject to the same rules as sheep regarding identification and need a green tag in each ear.

3. Visit a number of existing, well-run goat farms by appointment and ideally work on one of them.
4. Complete a 25-hour goat production course.
5. Ensure you purchase only healthy goats from reputable healthy herds.
6. Complete a farm plan and a business plan.

What can I produce from my herd of goats?

Milk

In Ireland goats' milk is primarily supplied to Glenisk or to cheese makers. The aim should be to achieve a yield of 1,000 litres per 300-day lactation. It is vital to obtain and produce top-quality animals, as this will have a substantial influence on profitability. Most processors require a steady supply of milk all year round and this requires manipulation of the breeding season. However, prices of 70 cent per litre are achievable where supply is correctly managed.

Cheese

The market for Irish goats' cheese is expanding all the time and new varieties are constantly finding their way onto supermarket shelves. Cheese production can be done through a partnership with an existing producer or by the farmer themselves. Complete a cheese-making course and visit other cheese makers to get

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their expertise and experience.

Meat

The market for meat in Ireland is still quite small but virtually every ethnic group worldwide eats goat meat. Dairy-type goats are widely available but difficult to fatten; meat-type goats (typically Boer or their crosses) are rarer but have been developed for weight gain and carcass conformation, and are therefore more suited to meat production. Prices in excess of €8.00 per kg carcass weight are achievable.

Other products

Liquid milk, ice cream, yoghurt and confectionary items are all produced from goats' milk in Ireland. Contact existing suppliers to discuss production and ideally visit them to see their operation. There is also the potential to create cosmetics using goat milk. In Ireland, this is primarily goat milk soap, but internationally, it is used to make a broad range of skincare cosmetics.



Facilities and finance

What facilities do I need for my goat herd?

Contrary to common opinion, domestic goats are not at all like their feral Irish relations. Their coats are not waterproof, and they have little subcutaneous fat to protect them from the cold. Therefore, shelter must be provided at all times to allow them to escape the elements. They are also browsers rather than grazers and can be susceptible to parasites. Most

agricultural buildings are suitable or can be adapted for housing.

Plans for goat housing and facilities can be obtained from Teagasc.

How do I get information about housing and facilities?

Drawings of sheds, parlours and other facilities should be available from your farm advisor, as will guidance with regard to planning permission. Ensure that any works you undertake comply with Department specifications on goat buildings and facilities. Available at:

www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmerschemespayments/tams/farmbuildingandstructurespecificationspdfformat/. Always obtain a number of quotes to ensure you are getting the best deal available.

Are there grants available for goat farming?

Under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS), there are grants available for a range of facilities including housing, handling facilities, waste storage and milking equipment. Further details are available from the DAFM website at: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmerschemespayments/tams/>, or from your agricultural advisor.

Do I need a financial plan?

Establishing any new farm enterprise is costly, particularly where you must purchase stock and new facilities. Applying to a lending institution for finance is often a necessary part of setting up your enterprise. Many, if not most, banks now look for a business plan to be completed as part of the finance application, and in any case, it should be an integral part of your plans.

Training

Can I do a training course on goat farming?

Teagasc runs an Introduction to Goat Farming course, subject to demand. This course covers all aspects of goat production and includes visits to a number of existing goat farms. Information on advice and

training is available from the Teagasc Goat webpage: www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/goats/.

Who can I learn from once I start goat farming?

One of the greatest challenges to setting up a goat enterprise is finding a ready supply

of good information. This is particularly the case in Ireland, where the industry is small and widespread. If at all possible, try to develop a relationship with an experienced goat farmer. This person may be able to answer a lot of questions you will undoubtedly have and may have other contacts that will be invaluable to you.

Further information

For further information, please contact Cian Condon, Environment and Technology Advisor – Drystock and Goats at:
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The following resources are also helpful

- www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/goats/
- www.teagascgoatblog.blogspot.com/p/the-irish-goat-hub.html
- www.facebook.com/Irish-Goat-Producers-Association-148588291885911/

