

Goats and Dogs are Becoming a Growing Business!

by W. Byron Nicodemus

There have been a lot of fads that have come and gone in the livestock farming market but none have become as steady as goats. Goats have become big business in the Midwest and the demand for both goats' milk and meat continues to grow. Like lamb, the demand for goat meat outpaces the domestic supply. Dale Hillegas right now raises about 120 to 160 goats each year on his farm in Ray County, Mo.

"We can sell all the goats for meat that we can raise every year," says Hillegas. "While maintaining a relative small herd of cattle, we discovered that goat meat actually sells higher in this area than beef." Hillegas raises a breed of goats that are a cross between Kiko goat from New Zealand and the South African Boer goat. The Kikos were first imported to the United States during the 1990s. The Boer is an improved indigenous breed with some infusion of European, Angora and Indian goat several years ago. Both the Kiko and the Boer goats were primarily bred as meat goats, thus making a great low maintenance animal.

Hillegas also breeds a small herd of LaMancha dairy goats and uses the milk to feed his calves that are unable to nurse and keeps several of the new born does every year to expand his herd.

While getting into the raising of goats, Hillegas noticed that he had a bigger problem with predators on the goats than he did with cattle. Back in 1987, he had started as a hobby doing some select breeding of bulldogs. While he liked the temperament of the English bulldog and the athletics of the American bulldog and Pit Bull terrier but less aggressiveness. Such as David Leavitt's Olde English Bulldogge, also called the Leavitt Bulldog. Hillegas quickly realized that this breed of dog made a great farm utility type dog.

Hillegas soon set about to buy, breed and establish his own stock of healthy bulldogs, named the Mountain Bulldog. He registered them with Tom Stodghill's Animal Research Foundation (ARF). Soon as the dog or dogs that are kept for breeding reached the age of two, Hillegas has them x-rayed to make sure there are no signs of canine hip dysplasia. One of the main physical problems suffered by many breeds in the class. Hillegas explains that the Mountain Bulldog makes the perfect farm utility type dog. The Mountain Bulldogs are

not overly aggressive, very athletic and have the specific temperament to make a great companion dog while protecting the livestock from predators. The dogs have very strong family ties and work best if raised with the livestock. Some of Hillegas's dogs live in the field with the goats on a day-to-day basis.

Hillegas has found the raising goat is a management challenge as they are more parasites prone than cattle. "When I get young goats, I put them in small lots where I can watch them," he explains. "I treat them for whatever problems that they have, de-worm and vaccinate them. They go on a self-fed growing ration made up of cracked corn, wheat midds, soy hull pellets and alfalfa pellets. When they get big enough, Hillegas turns the goats into a small pasture with open front sheds, self-feeder and water. Hillegas makes sure that both the goats along with the Mountain Bulldogs are dewormed every thirty days.

To keep the goats in the pasture and to help protect them along with the dogs, Hillegas utilizes electric fencing. The fences consist of 4 strands of high tensile steel controlled with a combination of a Parmak Mark 7-electric fence energizer and a Parmak Deluxe Field

Solar-Pak. Both the Solar-Pak charger and the Mark 7 charger are low impedance with maximum safe output with energy conservation for medium to large size pastures. As Hillegas points out, he uses Parmak because "It's a quality built, steel cased, charger that is manufactured right here in the United States, in fact here in the Midwest, and is competitive priced against the imported foreign made plastic chargers".

Hillegas states, "Sometimes on the bottom strand for goats, I will use a grounded barbwire. This just gives me added protection in keeping the goats in and predators out." "When I first started, I fenced the grazing pastures with steel netting," he stated. "But that was both expensive and time intensive. Later, I began fencing and sub-dividing the pastures with high-tensile electric wire. It's cheaper, goes up faster and does a much better job at containing goats and keeping predators out. If I were doing it over, I would have used electric fencing throughout."

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