



agriculture & rural development

Department:
agriculture
& rural development
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

CONSTRAINTS TO SMALL-SCALE GOAT PRODUCTION IN THE HIGHLAND SOURVELD AREA OF KWAZULU-NATAL

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A survey of 21 goat owners in the Impendhle district, part of an on-going study by the Farming Systems Research (FSR) Section, revealed some of the problems faced by these farmers. Average flock size was found to be 13, ranging from 5 to 34 goats per household. All those interviewed kept goats for ceremonial purposes. In fact, according to 76% of those interviewed, this was the most important reason for keeping goats, while the remaining 24% said that the most important reason was to generate cash income.

Economic inputs into goat production in this area are generally small, with this being reflected in the fact that only 24% of owners purchased winter feed supplements for their goats. The feed purchased comprised mainly veld bales; two of the three farmers purchasing bagged feed bought molasses meal, which is cheap but does not supplement the shortage of protein in winter sourveld.

Table 1. Problems reported by farmers during the initial survey

Problem	Frequency of Mention
worms	10
diarrhoea	6
poor condition	6
failure to multiply	2
eye problems	2
dogs	2
external parasites	2
orf	1
theft	1
abortions	1

Of those interviewed, only 33% had ever dosed goats to control internal parasites, and none of the farmers interviewed had ever dipped or vaccinated their goats.

Constraints to production

Problems reported by the farmers interviewed are summarized in Table 1. Observations relevant to the information presented in the table:

- Heavy worm infestations often cause diarrhorrea and thus the first two problems are closely related.
- Sogs and theft, although not listed frequently as problems, were found to have affected 57% of those interviewed in the 1997/1998 period and accounted for the loss of 49 adult goats with an approximate value of R17 000.
- Efforts are being made by the FSR Section and veterinary Services to isolate the causes of abortions, since these have been found to occur more frequently than the listing of the problem suggests.



Zulu goat flock: Typical early morning scene

During our study of goat flocks in Impendlhe, other problems have been identified. One of the most serious of these is the indiscriminate burning of veld, resulting in critical shortages of grass during winter and early spring. This is an issue which the community itself must address. Many of the livestock owners see the burning of veld as destructive, selfish and unnecessary. Farmers are aware that there are insufficient crop residues available to support animals over the winter period when veld quality and availability is low. This is largely because people are not planting much maize (despite the availability of arable land) due to the lack of fences i the area. Crop residues carry animals through June and July but by August this source of fodder is exhausted.



Small-scale goat farmer involved in FSR Section's on-farm trials

Winter nutrition is thus a definite constraint to goat production in the sourveld areas. The time of kidding exacerbates the problem since the majority of ewes kid either in spring or in autumn. Those kidding in autumn must feed their lambs through winter while those kidding in spring suffer from poor nutrition during late gestation when foetal requirements are high. The ewes kidding in spring are subject to further difficulties in the rains are late, as this results in severe feed shortages.

Departmental strategies to address constraints

The Department has launched the following initiatives to address the constraints to goat production in the Highland Sourveld areas.

- The involvement of Veterinary Services, Extension and the Farming Systems Research Section in presenting farmer's days and organising monthly animal health clinics.
- Liaison with feed and drug suppliers to facilitate training of farmers on the use of products.
- On-farm demonstrations and trial by Extension and Farming Systems Research Section. This includes
 - Collection of faecal and blood samples to establish the internal parasite challenge
 - regular weighing of goats to establish growth patterns under different feeding systems.
- The formation of livestock interest groups to increase the farmer's voice and buying power.



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Winter nutrition: goat grazing on crop residues

Lastly, the aim of our involvement in the community is to improve animal productivity. However, if this is not associated with changes in mind-set and a move towards commercial production, the increase in productivity will be short-lived. Marketing is an integral part of the overall plan: it is believed that only those people who are progressive and want to spend money and time will see any benefit from the involvement of the FSR Section, Veterinary Services and Extension. It is unlikely that people will spend the amount of money required to increase the productivity of the animals as if they are unwilling to sell animals to cover these costs.