

*News Article*

By: John E. Woodmansee, Extension Educator, Agriculture/Natural Resources

E-mail: [jwoodman@purdue.edu](mailto:jwoodman@purdue.edu)

Date: July 9, 2018

Please use by: July 19, 2018

Purdue Extension – Whitley County

Whitley County Courthouse Annex

115 South Line Street

Columbia City, IN 46725-2325

Phone: (260) 244-7615 or (260) 625-3313

[www.extension.purdue.edu/whitley](http://www.extension.purdue.edu/whitley)

## Understanding agriculture: goats

If you are one who is perplexed by simple questions about agriculture that you don't understand, read on. Today's article is a primer on goats, written primarily for the curious non-farmer.

The goat is thought to be one of the first domesticated animals. Goats are found on every continent and in all parts of the world, except for the Arctic. They are a very important part of many cultures and ethnic groups. Early settlers to America brought goats over on the Mayflower, serving as a source of milk and meat along the way.

There are four basic types of goats: dairy, meat, fiber and pygmy. Dairy goats are milked, and the fluid milk can be consumed or made into other dairy products. Any type of goat can be used for meat, but meat goats are noticeably more muscled than other goats. Fiber goats are raised for the fiber from their fleeces. Pygmy goats are small and can be used for milk, meat, or simply kept as a pet.

Goats have also been used as utility animals to pull carts.

Toggenburg, a dairy goat breed, is the oldest known registered breed in the world. Other dairy goat breeds include Alpine, LaMancha, Nubian, Saanan and others. LaManchas have very small ears (it almost looks like they don't have ears), while Nubians have long ears that extend at least 1 inch past their muzzle.

While dairy cows have udders with four compartments, goat udders have two. In America, the fluid dairy product we consume most is cow milk, but goat milk is more highly consumed in the rest of the world.

Meat goats are dominated in Indiana by the Boer Goat. (You may recall that an adult male breeding hog is called a "boar" – pronounced the same, but spelled differently). Other meat goats include Kiko and Spanish Goat. Spanish goats are not a true breed, but rather describe a "meat-type" goat with a small udder that browses well on range conditions. Virtually unheard of just a quarter century ago, meat goats have made a huge surge in popularity in recent years. The American Boer Goat Association was established in 1993, the same year they were first imported to the United States from Australia and New Zealand.

Fiber goats include Angora and Cashmere. Angora is a true breed that produces mohair, while cashmere goats are a type of goat, rather than a true breed. Cashmere goats provide commercial quantities of cashmere, and can come from Spanish meat goats, Toggenburgs, Saanens or Nubians. Cashmere is considered a luxury fiber.

Pygmy goats, as the name implies, are smaller in stature than other goats. They are only 16 to 23 inches tall at the withers (top point above shoulders). If milked, the milk is high in milkfat.

Several terms are used in goat production. A buck is an intact male, while a doe is a female. Bucks are also called billy goats, and does are also called nanny goats. Baby goats are called kids. Young females are called doelings, while young males are called bucklings. A dam is the mother of a kid, while a sire is the father of a kid. A wether is a castrated male. A fleece is the hair from one goat. Chevon is goat meat. A group of goats is called a herd. Birthing is called kidding.

The gestation (pregnancy) period of a goat usually lasts 148-152 days, or 5 months. The gestation period can vary slightly among breeds.

---

It is the policy of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service that all persons have equal opportunity and access to its educational programs, services, activities, and facilities without regard to race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, disability or status as a veteran.

Purdue University is an Affirmative Action institution. This material may be available in alternative formats.

Goats are ruminant animals with a 4-chambered stomach. They need a combination of high-fiber roughages (such as pasture or hay), and concentrates to supply energy and nutrients. Concentrates may include cereal grains like corn, oats, or wheat, along with fats, minerals, proteins and vitamins. Water is always made available.

Goats don't like to get their feet wet. You may have noticed some barn lots with goats where the producer has provided a "mini-mountain" for goats to climb on. They love to climb and play "king of the mountain," it is instinctual to their nature.

Goats also love to browse on shrubs and other types of plants. Capitalizing on this trait, experiments have been done in forestland with goats in efforts to control multiflora rose, an invasive plant species.

Although goats can usually be distinguished easily from sheep, one way to tell the difference is to look at their tail. Goats' tails stick up, while sheep tails hang down (sheep tails may also be docked, or shortened, for health and sanitary reasons).

If you ever look closely at a goat's eye, you may be surprised. People, along with many other animals, have round pupils, while a goat's pupil is rectangular in nature, situated horizontally. This increases their depth perception and peripheral vision.

Goat producers work with veterinarians to maintain the health of their herd. Diseases and internal parasites can be problems with goats.

Bucks, or billy goats, have a distinct strong odor as they become sexually mature. This is especially strong during mating season (called "rut").

Goats do not possess the strong flocking instinct that sheep do. As with sheep, though, producers must take precautions to protect goat herds from predators.

According to USDA, preliminary figures for 2017 indicated that there were 11,000 milk goats on farms in Indiana, with 33,000 meat and other goats. In 2007, there were 8,400 milk goats on farms in Indiana, with 24,800 meat and other goats, a 31% and 33% increase, respectively, over that period for those two categories.

Some material was sourced from *Goat Resource Handbook*, 4-H 135R, by The Ohio State University.