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MAJOR CHALLENGES OF US GOAT PRODUCERS AND WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

Three limiting resources to feed the world in the future are arable land, water, and Ag talent. Obviously, goat production is in this mix, because we need to use appropriate technology to improve goat production. Also, goat production is influenced by imports, markets, and a fragmented industry. Although imports may be good to fill in shortfalls in production, they may harm the industry due to their relatively lower prices compared to domestically produced goat meat. The markets are unstructured and generally lack accurate price discovery, which ultimately, makes pricing difficult. Furthermore, there have been the challenges of a fragmented industry, in which producers do not have access to adequate drugs or vaccines as well as antibiotics approved for use. Despite these challenges, the American Goat Federation is championing the course of the Goat Industry (e.g., at APHIS). Change is hard; however, all stakeholders have to embrace current technology to improve goat production, and increase profit margins.

Keywords: Goat Producers, Goat Production, Challenges of Producers

Introduction

The Three Major Limiting Factors Facing World Food Production

The world is faced with three major bottleneck resources that will affect world food production and our ability to feed the world going forward to 2050. Those three limiting resources are arable land, water, and Ag talent. First, there is a direct connection between available arable land and world food security. The world's arable land is decreasing constantly for a variety of reasons. Second, water is a very limiting resource that limits production in all parts of the world. Clean, safe water for crops and livestock is a critical production component. Third, Ag talent is a fixable factor limiting production; it is the most limiting factor we have right now. There is a major shortage of well-educated, knowledgeable, and capable people, who can manage crops and livestock. Goat production is no exception to this problem as the age-old perceptions about goats even among livestock people still persist. The story needs to change and change shortly! We need to encourage quality management utilizing the latest technology, which will utilize goat genetics to produce high-quality protein for human consumption. Further, the associated products derived from goat production including premium fabrics, health and beauty products are both in high demand. All these products result from utilizing forages that otherwise would likely go unused.

US Supply and Demand Factors Affecting Goat Production

Imports

We currently import the majority of goat meat consumed in the US and the import amount is increasing annually. Imported goat meat is both helpful and harmful. It is helpful in that it provides market fulfillment that covers our production shortage. It is harmful in that it is often lower quality and it further undercuts our production based on external factors such as the value of the dollar.

Markets

Our markets are unstructured and lack accurate price discovery in many cases, leaving producers without adequate financial returns. While marketing goats directly from the farm to consumers is both economically efficient as well as providing immediate traceback, it also comes with the lack of price information that is published thereby informing others as to what current pricing was for a particular commodity on a particular day. This lack of information results in many producers either overselling or more often underselling their production. We can look up prices for most categories of goats at a few major auctions immediately on the Internet. Those auctions are often a long distance from a producer and thus they create their own price and it is not shared. This situation results in significant price variations that often leave producers with less income and net profit than otherwise would be available.

Fragmented Industry

Our US Industry is seriously fragmented, leaving producers without adequate drugs, vaccines, and antibiotics approved for use in goats. These shortages result in lower quality animal welfare, higher losses and lower production. Without a voice at the national table, goats have long been overlooked and not included in key decisions making involving these products as well as important relevant research. Further fragmentation results in goats not being a recognized source for seed stock, slaughter, or distribution channel for live animals, meat or other goat-related products. There is great value in a well-organized national organization that provides industry oversight, representation and leadership to move the industry forward on an equal basis with other livestock organizations. The American Goat Federation (AGF) is that voice! It is the voice of all goat producers in the U.S. It does represent every producer in all aspects of goat production. For example, we are at the table at the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Industry Sector meetings each year. Our concerns are heard and are being addressed. Your input is not only taken but desired and even demanded so we can appropriately represent your needs.

Livestock Production Opposition

Extremist Groups

There are numerous groups that wish to eliminate all livestock production in the US. They brand livestock production as cruelty to animals, unsafe production methods; meat is bad for your health and a variety of other bogus reasons. These groups are both well-financed and very active. They represent a profound threat to the future of animal production as we know it. The American Goat Federation provides professional representation on these issues and has a joint voice with other animal industry groups giving a voice of reason. The Carbon Footprint argument is one example of a strategy used to reduce or eliminate livestock production via the emission of harmful gases from livestock production. They use bogus science to back their claims of environmental damage from livestock.

Animal Welfare

The gap continues to grow wider separating production agricultural producers from consumers. Many practices long used to produce healthy livestock and quality meat products are now under attack due to ignorance. Unfortunately, there are just enough cases of real animal abuse to fuel the continuation of the animal welfare debate. Such cases result in paradigm shifts that create negative welfare for animals – such as wild horses in the west.

Change is Hard!

Nobody likes to be changed! Change is critical! It allows us to discover our untapped potential. Change is often disruptive and often comes from outside. The goat industry is undergoing change with such change needing to continue at an increasing rate. We lag behind our sister animal groups on many fronts including genomics and research. There are great examples of disrupting innovators including Amazon the world's largest retailer that has no inventory, Uber – the fastest-growing transportation group that owns no cars, Airbnb – which owns no homes. Disrupters in the goat industry – Genomics, EBV's, autonomous vehicles, drones, robotics, RFID (Radio Frequency Identification Device) and Internet Marketing all provide profound changes and opportunities immediately! We need to adopt all proven current technology to increase production, improve profit margins, maximize animal welfare and all other quality industry improvements. We desperately need to use social media to tell our story – Goats are one of the most productive animals on earth, they improve the environment, they do not require large amounts of feed concentrates and they provide great companion animals. We need to launch a major offensive effort telling the world about the value of goats in the economy, environment and healthy food. It is imperative that we produce our products using the best technology while providing top-notch food security.

Conclusion

There are great potential advantages for goats in the future as we are not in the sights of oppression groups. We have made great progress on the Scrapie and Q Fever fronts. Scrapie is down to the lowest level in years and if we can support the surveillance program we should be able to return to exporting our animals in the near future. Pay attention to the program requirements, plastic tag your animals! Observe your animals and report any suspects – we can clean this disease up. Q Fever is a manageable disease that we can also deal with as we move forward in the future. Without proper knowledge and management this disease can be costly! Watch for our AGF Posters that will give you the information you need to deal with both issues!