

INTRODUCTION

In Wales goats are mainly kept: to produce milk, meat or fibre (Mohair and Cashmere); for showing; or as pets and companion animals. There are no reliable data on goat numbers in Wales although holdings are more common in the south of the country. In the UK as a whole there are approximately 88,000 – 93,000 goats including breeding female goats (does) being used for milk production. This leaflet focuses on fibre production from goats.

BREEDS

Angora goats produce mohair fibre (angora rabbits produce angora wool). Angora kids produce the highest quality fibre (approximately 20 microns in diameter) at their first shearing, with maturity, fibre quality declines (approximately 40 microns). However, quantity increases from first shearing (3-4 kg) through subsequent shearings (6-8 kg). Shearing takes place twice a year in spring and autumn. Breeding stock are normally culled around 6 years old. Other outputs apart from mohair include milk and meat.

Cashmere is the valuable fine undercoat found to varying degrees on all goats except angora which is harvested by combing although it is also possible to shear. Feral goats produce small quantities (50g) of high quality cashmere (16 microns or less) however in Scotland specialised breeding programmes have resulted in an increase in quantity produced (300g or more). There are currently 50 producers in the UK with a herd of 2,500 goats. The UK would need a breeding herd of approximately 2 million females to be self sufficient in Cashmere production.

MARKET

Mohair is considered a luxury fibre which is soft and light yet hard wearing. The market for mohair, is however, affected by the fashion industry and world prices are subject to large fluctuations. The demand for cashmere garments is strong, particularly in Western Europe, USA and Japan and is less affected by fashion trends. Consequently the price for cashmere is more stable than mohair.

Much of the demand for high value fibre in the UK is met by imports. There is a great potential to substitute imports for home-grown fibre providing there is sufficient commercial quantity and the quality meets the market specification. Currently, Britain processes 60% of the world mohair, almost all of which is imported. UK production is currently around 25 tonnes, of which approximately 10 tonnes is used by producers or sold to home spinners. Scotland processes over 1000 tonnes of imported cashmere (60% of world production) each year.

REQUIREMENTS

There are a range of alternative livestock fibre production enterprises that can use the resources currently present on the farm, such as fencing and buildings and utilise the labour skills gained from other livestock production enterprises.

Angora goats can be stocked at similar levels to ewes on equivalent grazing i.e. on improved grassland approximately 10 does plus followers per ha. A high standard of fencing is required. A single offset electric wire on an existing fence is advantageous.

Housing is required in winter and field shelter is needed in summer. This is particularly important at kidding time and after shearing. Goats begin breeding in early autumn as declining daylight triggers the onset of oestrus. On average one buck will serve 25 does. Gestation period is approximately 150 days, with 50% of does, on average, carrying twins.



Fig 1: Angora goat



Fig 2: Goats bred for cashmere

HEALTH

Goats do require a high standard of animal husbandry and therefore labour inputs may be higher. Health problems suffered by goats are similar to those suffered by sheep. Professional advice should always be sought regarding the health of goat herds. Particular areas to monitor in goats include worms (helminths) including anthelmintic resistance; clostridial diseases, tetanus, foot rot and overgrown hooves.

COSTS

Initial set-up costs for mohair production will depend on the quality of the animal. The average price for does is £50 and for bucks is £100. Animals bought from members of the British Angora Goat Sire reference scheme will be more expensive but will have finer quality fleeces. Membership of British Mohair Marketing is recommended and currently costs £30. Prices for Cashmere goats will be dependent on the quality of the animal and whether they have been part of a fibre improvement breeding programme. Average prices for domestic/feral goats are between £20 - £50 whereas prices for goats from breeding programmes are in the range of £40 - £70 per animal. Imported cashmere goats can cost as much as £180 for does and £250 for bucks.

Variable costs for a 100 breeding doe unit can be expected to be in the region of £4,000 per annum. Veterinary & medicine costs can be higher in a goat unit than a sheep unit. Shearing costs are also greater. However, variable costs for non-breeding stock such as wethers (castrated males) can be considerably lower; in the range of £450 –£800 per 100 wethers.

REVENUES

Returns from an angora unit are dependent on world market prices for angora and can fluctuate each year. It is recommended that a potential producer checks the current price and recent prices with British Mohair Marketing. A recent example of returns is given in Table 1. Primary and secondary processing of the fibre by the producer can add value to the clip.

Table 1: Examples of yields and recent prices for mohair

| Goat Age | Yield (kg) | Fibre price (£/kg) | Value of annual clip (£) |
|----------|------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Kid | ~ 3.5 | 5.50 | 19.25 |
| Young | ~ 5.0 | 3.25 | 16.25 |
| Adult | ~ 6.0 | 1.65 | 9.90 |

Fibre prices for cashmere are considerably higher than for mohair, however yields are much lower. Recent example of returns are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Examples of yields and recent prices for cashmere

| Fibre diameter | Yield (kg) | Fibre price (£/kg) | Value (£) |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|
| < 16.5 microns | 0.03 – 0.05 | 90 | 2.70 – 4.50 |
| 16.5 – 18.5 microns | 0.1 – 0.2 | 70 | 7.00 – 14.00 |

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Stock movement records must be kept. Goats require identification ear tags or tattoos under current legislation. Animal welfare requirements must be met.

NEXT STEPS

Examine the financial situation of the business and available resources, such as labour, building and fences.

Contact the relevant co-operatives or associations.

Market research – investigate the markets and visit established enterprises where possible. Fibre prices are subject to world prices and can be very volatile.

CONTACTS

British Angora Goat Society – www.britishangoragoats.org.uk

British Mohair Marketing - E-mail: secretary@angoragoat.fsnet.co.uk

Scottish Cashmere Association www.cashmere-scotland.co.uk