

Get Your Goat (Part Three of Using Your Resources Wisely)

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The July article in this series featured a pig purchased from a local pork producer (say that three times fast...). My next purchase, and the subject of this article, was a goat. This particular animal was a three-year-old dairy doe. She was culled due to poor production. She had an appetite for grain as if she was milking well, but became very plump, didn't breed back, and as a result was selected to leave the herd. Obviously, this example of goat meat (or chevon as it's known elsewhere) is not typical of the relatively young goats raised expressly for meat. But rather, this animal is an example of a by-product of the dairy goat industry, not too unlike a second plus lactation cow culled for low production and/or reproduction problems. This type meat often requires the low-heat, slower cooking and/or marinate methods, when compared to a year old or younger kid goat (which would be more similar to lamb for example). Since goats reach physiological maturity earlier than do cattle, an 18-month-old doe would perhaps be somewhat similar in carcass maturity to a 30 plus month old first-calf heifer in the cattle industry. Young goat or lamb has few cuts requiring slow cooking or marinating, whereas a more mature goat has more cuts proportionately that would.

The goat was purchased for \$125. The price was based on the whole goat, not on a per LB basis. As it turned out, the goat weighed about 167 LB live weight, which was reflected quite closely by the weigh tape measurement taken on the farm. Currently, local goats are primarily marketed through the local auctions with a few marketed directly to certain ethnic groups who already appreciate the fine qualities of goat meat and know the various cooking methods necessary (that depend on the age of the animal). You'll need to change your management and marketing techniques to match up with your intended market and with what type goats you own (meat breeds, dairy buck kids, cull does, etc). Matching your genetics and production methods to your targeted end market may be the most challenging part of the process.

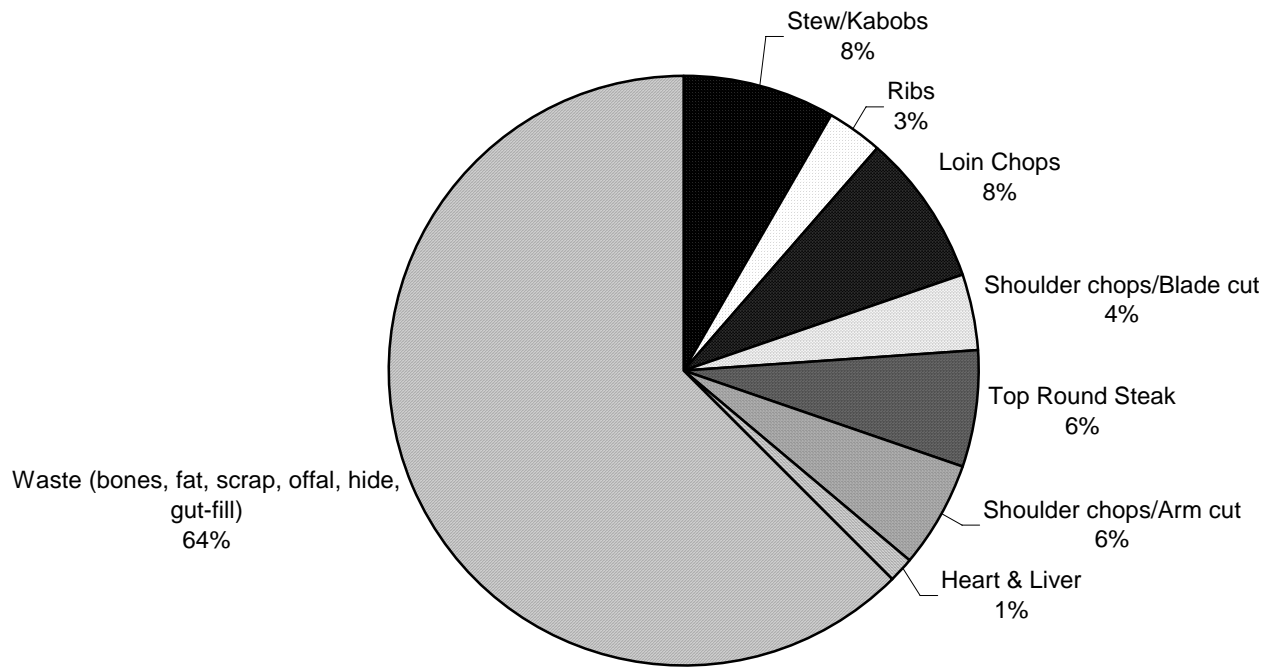
In the following example, a St. Lawrence County-born and raised goat was shadowed from farm to freezer this spring. Although this goat came from a dairy goat farm, other traits of goats make them a popular choice in this region. For example, goats make good use of the often-plentiful browse available in Northern New York. Meadows that haven't been clipped in several years can be quite quickly brought to a state where plowing or pasturing is again possible. Goats have been used for untold years in this land-clearing capacity with great success. Meat can be a wonderful by-product along the way.

As discussed in July's article, adding an extra enterprise to your farm operation should be considered carefully. One must be sure that enough time, space, feed, and other resources are available so the new enterprise does not harm your existing primary farm endeavors. However, as an additional family food source, or as a method to make a product for sale or barter, you might consider the economics of raising goats.

At \$125 per head, this goat cost 74.4 cents per LB of live weight. This weight, of course, includes gut fill, hide, feet, and other inedible parts along with the edible portions. As an

aside, I plan to try tanning the hide (it weighed over 12 LB fresh) to see if there is any on-farm potential for adding value there as well. See Chart One for the details on this goat comparing live weight to all the components it was converted to.

Chart One. Component percent of live weight (167 LB)

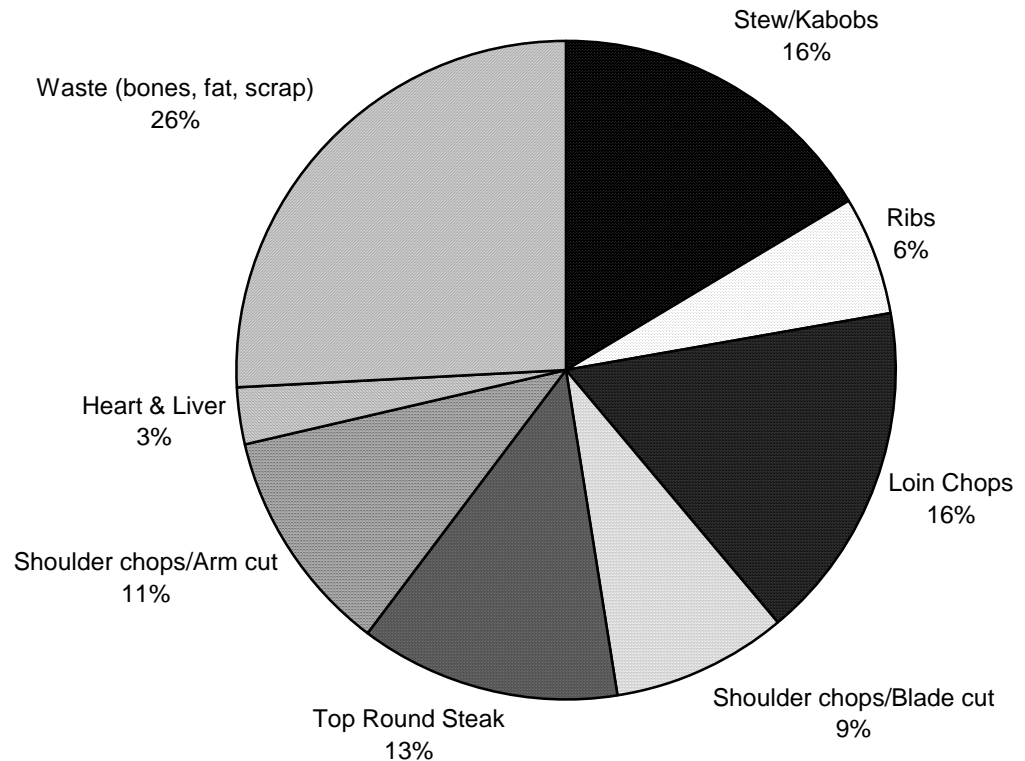


On slaughter day, the animal was dispatched at the slaughter facility with a minimum of stress. After being bled out, eviscerated and skinned, the carcass was hung in the cooler for 6 days until further processing could be done. Two custom USDA slaughter plants exist in St. Lawrence County and a number of non-USDA sites are available options as well. Not surprisingly, prices will vary by services provided by the processor. In fact, not all processors care to handle sheep or goats due to the size of the carcass (fees are often based on a per head charge as well as a set rate per weight of carcass processed) and the HACCP (hazard analysis critical control points) requirements. The written and approved HACCP procedures are required to be on file for each individual USDA slaughter plant for each specific type of livestock handled. For example, goats might be slaughtered at a USDA inspected facility, but if the facility has not developed and

maintained their HACCP procedures specifically for goats, then any goat meat processed at this facility will not be USDA stamped and therefore cannot be resold.

The farmer sold this animal by the head at the farm. Processing, in this case, included a flat fee for slaughter (\$15) plus the cut and wrap charge (cutting and vacuum packaging was \$.35 per LB based on the cold carcass weight (CCW) plus tax (\$3.94). The CCW includes the potentially edible portion of the animal (or that part which gets hung up on a hook in the cooler awaiting the cut and wrap process). Some bones, fat, and scrap (grizzle, membranes, veins and all that good stuff that the dog prefers) are a portion of the CCW, which will not end up in your freezer. This point often causes some confusion for would-be freezer meat buyers and can add to their unease at making such a purchase. See Chart Two for a breakdown of the CCW on this particular goat. Components will vary from goat to goat and butcher to butcher depending on genetics of animal, diet, live weight, age at slaughter, and the cut preferences of the consumer. This chart does give you an example of what you might expect for a ballpark estimate, however.

Chart Two. Components of cold carcass (84 LB)



As mentioned earlier, the live weight was 167 LB. The chilled hanging weight or CCW was 84 LB. Once processed and packaged, the total weight of the meat ready for the freezer was about 62 LB. So, in this instance, the meat in the freezer was nearly 37% of the live weight of the goat. This figure may be a little lower than the norm due to the high degree of fat covering the gut of this animal and the fact that she was on feed up to an hour or so before slaughter. Both factors tend to reduce carcass and packaged meat weights. Once you calculate the costs (\$125 for the goat and \$48.34 for the processing), the final cost per pound was \$2.79 for steaks, chops, ribs and stew or kabob meat. All meats were vacuum packaged into meal-sized portions that will stay fresh in the freezer for quite a while.

Most folks don't realize that more goat meat is consumed around the world compared with any other meat. However, we Americans are not typical of the world's meat eaters. Goat meat is highly favored by certain people of Italian, Jamaican, or Arab decent, for

example. Yet chevon is not often featured at your local restaurants. Personally, I've found goat meat to be reasonably similar to venison, but that should not be too surprising considering they are cousins of sorts.

Consumers interested in supporting local agriculture (your neighbors) may be interested in trying chevon. Most people need to try a free sample, however, before committing their hard-earned dollars to a new mystery meat. As mentioned earlier, some folks already know they love goat meat, but they are not sure how or where to go to find it. Such consumers are helping to keep your food dollars locally invested, they are promoting the use of our natural resources (land and labor), saving some fossil fuel use by buying food that is less world-traveled, and can enjoy the benefit of knowing where their food came from.

As producers, we must determine if the inputs, such as grain, land and building resources, labor, and marketing pathways are developed enough to allow us to bring this food product to the consumers of the region. Maybe someday we will see billboards asking the question "Got Goat?".