

On-Farm Marketing of Slaughter Goats

There are several ways you can market lambs and slaughter goats in the Northeast US. One method is to forgo middlemen and market your animals directly from your farm to consumers. Before you attempt this market, you need to determine what size and age lamb or goat kid makes the most sense for you to raise based on 1) what consumer demand is in your area and 2) what the costs of production and expected returns are to grow animals out for each category. You also need to understand what responsibilities you undertake when selling animals on-farm. The following article outlines some of these duties.

Direct on-farm marketing can be time consuming and stressful depending on how many of its inherent responsibilities you end up assuming. However, it's also a great chance to meet new folks and learn about a diverse range of cultures and ethnic groups. By "direct on-farm marketing" I refer to two scenarios, 1) a private buyer planning to consume the goat themselves purchases a goat at your farm and either slaughters it there or loads it in their vehicle to slaughter elsewhere, and 2) a consumer contacts you directly to arrange delivery of a goat to a butcher without necessarily laying eyes on said goat.

Depending on the clientele in your local area, you may not have much choice as to which of these scenarios you get involved with. Rather, your clientele may have a strong preference for only one of these methods of direct marketing. Your ability to conform to their needs may determine how many goats you sell. However, prior to getting involved with either scenario, it's a good idea to form some plans for managing either situation on your particular farm. Here are some considerations:

Scenario 1 – the consumer comes to your farm and may or may not slaughter there.

- A) Clientele – Your clientele can range from recent immigrants (possibly refugees) to your country to well established citizens whose families pride themselves on keeping alive ethnic traditions of doing their own selection, slaughtering and preparing of goat for family celebrations. In either case you may find an extended family descending on your farm. Keep in mind that the visit to your farm may be considered a special outing. If you farm for the isolation, this family outing can be a little disconcerting though likely beneficial for your mental health! It can also be time consuming depending on how you organize the visit.
- B) Advertising – If you live near a city with a large refugee community, you can advertise in refugee newsletters and at government offices and religious centers that offer refugee services. However, refugee communities can be close-knit and wary of business that doesn't involve a personal touch. If possible, arrange to talk to a gathering in person about your business. In reality though, many goats and lamb producers who market large quantities of animals directly have found that the refugee community seeks them out and no further advertisement is necessary. More aggressive advertisement can be accomplished by writing short articles accompanied by photos about your farm and farm produce and submitting these to magazines, radio shows, TV stations, newspapers and associations that cater to ethnic groups that historically consume goat meat.
- C) The farm visit – newly arrived refugees may not have easy access to cars and phones. This translates to "they may show up unannounced to purchase a goat any time they can arrange a ride out". The timing of this visit often immediately precedes specific holidays.

If you want to limit on-farm purchases to specific days, try to find out what times of the week are convenient to both you and your clientele and then come up with a plan to publicize these times to the refugee community. Customers who are long time citizens are generally quite willing to phone ahead to make an appointment to pick out animals. However, particularly the first time they come to your farm, they may wish to bring the whole family. This means it is generally convenient for them to visit on a weekend. Keep in mind that many families do not have large refrigeration or freezer capacities hence they may **need** to slaughter on the day preceding or morning of a specific holiday. On-farm marketing may not be ideal for your family if weekends and holidays are your only private times together.

- D) The farm dog – no matter how friendly your farm dog is, it is often best to be prepared to offer to confine him when customers arrive. Folks from the city may not be comfortable around an unrestrained dog. Immigrants may come from countries where dogs are trained by private owners or the military to attack people. A refugee who has had family members hunted down by dogs is not going to be cured of his or her dog phobia on the basis of your saying “Don’t worry, she won’t bite.”
- E) Location of your “for sale” goats – Try to have your slaughter kids separated from kids you are not offering for sale. This way you don’t have buyers pointing at kids you are retaining as breeding stock only to have you say repeatedly, “oh sorry, that one is not for sale”. Remember, customers may not readily understand that the best animals are kept for breeding future generations. Instead they may get the impression you are attempting to shortchange them. If it is not possible to separate slaughter kids from the rest of the herd, have them clearly marked in advance so buyers have an easy time grasping what pool of animals they can select from. Try to have slaughter animals located at easy access and in an area where it is easy to catch up individual animals. It will save you time if you do not have to walk out to a far pasture or bring in the whole herd to corral a selected animal.
- F) Bargaining – Unless you love to bargain, try to have a fixed price you offer all on-farm customers. If you allow the price to vary from customer to customer, the word will get around in the close knit communities you may be selling to. Consequently, you may find your on-farm transactions taking forever because you and the customer are bickering over prices. I have had customers who I have grown close to suffer major economic reversals or family tragedies. In these situations, I have made them a gift of a part or whole carcass rather than lowered my prices. This does not mean that you can’t have a range of prices depending on the quality, age, size of the goats you are selling. Just make sure that your customers can easily identify why an animal is being assigned to a certain group and what your fixed price is for that group.
- G) Slaughter arrangements – The easiest situation here is if the customer loads the goat in their vehicle and slaughters it elsewhere. Otherwise you need to decide how much you want to accommodate them to make slaughtering on-farm convenient.
 - a. At bare minimum you will need to provide a tree or beam with a hook affixed to it for hanging carcasses and a clean 5 gallon plastic bucket of water. There are several ways to restrain small ruminants for slaughter that are more humane than simply hoisting them up by their hind legs. To get an idea of humane restrainers you can build for your own farm, study the basic principles of humane restraint outlined by [Dr. Temple Grandin](#) on her website. One example of a double rail for small ruminants that can be

greatly simplified for on-farm use is shown on the web at <http://www.sheepgoatmarketing.info/education/restrainer/slideshow/index.html> .

b. In the United States, it is illegal for a farmer to slaughter for a customer unless you are also a licensed state, federal or custom slaughter plant. Therefore, your customers need to slaughter for themselves without your participation. Make sure that your customers are experienced butchers and that you are comfortable with the slaughter practices of a wide range of ethnic groups. If you provide a table for cutting up carcasses, you also need to provide provision for sanitizing the table between customers. Same goes for any equipment, utensils you lend out. Some farms go as far as providing a fire pit for cooking the meat, searing the hair off goat heads, etc. or even a picnic area for the resulting feast. However, these facilities will increase the time families spend on your farm. Before you provide them, consider how much interruption of your private life you are comfortable with. Depending on the time of year, your butchering area may need protection from rain, cold and snow.

c. Many cultures consume most of the goat. In this case, disposal of the remains is relatively simple. If people are washing stomachs and intestines, providing extra water or a hose is helpful. You can then direct them to empty rumen contents, etc. into a wheelbarrow for you to properly discard later. Hides can be salted and either tanned by your family or stacked for shipping to a professional tannery. However, if you have lots of customers or customers who do not want the “innards”, you need to make more sophisticated provisions. These can range from having a pre-dug trench for customers to wheelbarrow the remains to, to paying a rendering company to pick up the offal weekly, to composting the remains on farm. Composting of offal is legal in some countries and in parts of the U.S. Contact local representatives of the Department of Environmental Concerns to find out your state’s legal guidelines or recommendations for proper burying, burning and/or composting of offal. In New York, on-farm disposal of materials like offal that are generated on-farm does not require a solid waste permit and is exempt from DEC regulations. However, you must conform to local ordinances and not pollute water sources. If you are composting lots of bones and offal you need to mix them with a low nitrogen, high carbon medium to obtain the right carbon to nitrogen ratio for rapid composting. Wood chips, sawdust, straw, and old round bales of grass hay are more suitable as a medium than are soiled bedding, manure or lawn clippings. The Cornell Solid Waste Management Center publication, <http://compost.css.cornell.edu/naturalrenderingFS.pdf>, provides the recommended procedures for dealing with on-farm disposal of offal.

Scenario 2 – the consumer contracts to purchase a goat for delivery to a slaughterhouse without necessarily viewing the goat.

- A) Clientele – Customers in this case are often busy people. They may come from an ethnic group with a history of goat consumption or may be trying out goat to see how it fits into their diet as a low-fat red meat. If they are new to goat meat, be sure to provide them with some excellent, convenient recipes and cooking tips.
- B) Advertising – A common mistake here is to advertise your slaughter goats in the same farmer newspapers you would advertise breeding stock. Instead, it works best to advertise them in the classified ads of general public newspapers in nearby metropolitan areas. You want to use terms that emphasize the finished product. However, unless the

meat is to be slaughtered by a USDA slaughterhouse rather than a custom plant, you cannot advertise that you are selling meat. Remember that legally you are selling the live animal. Lamb producers will often state that they are selling freezer lamb. There really is not a similar term for goats. Often the best you can do is state that you have slaughter goats for sale, delivery to butcher included. Some other ways to advertise are 1) send off articles to magazines, newsletters, radio and TV stations that represent specific ethnic groups, 2) post flyers at religious and social centers preceding specific holidays, 3) ask to speak to various ethnic associations or clubs, 4) advertise on college campuses with a large foreign student population, 5) leave your brochure or business card with nearby custom and/or USDA inspected slaughterhouses, 6) hand out free samples of a goat meat dish (shish kebab is perfect for this) at local farmers' markets or community festivals, etc. In the U.S., meat used thus must be USDA inspected. Usually the event will have rules as to whether the meat must be cooked by a caterer or by a farm with a specified amount of liability insurance.

- C) Price setting - Again, have a set price for all your customers unless you love to bargain. If you are selling the animal by its live weight, be sure the customer understands how much packaged meat they will likely receive from the animal. Many people are no longer familiar with livestock rearing and may expect an 80 lb. live weight animal to yield 80 lbs of meat.
- D) Butchering arrangements – If at all possible, have the licensed butcher and customer talk together to determine the cost and specific instructions for butchering. This way, there is less chance of confusion as to how the meat should be cut up and any problems that arise are not your responsibility. However, I find that more and more of my customers insist on having me take care of all business transactions for them. This trend has resulted in these transactions taking more of my time. A reliable butcher who is tolerant of the needs of various ethnic groups is a must for this kind of on-farm marketing. It is important that you and the customer understand clearly who is responsible for instructing the butcher, paying the slaughter bill, and picking up the packaged meat or carcass.

On-farm marketing is a great way to eliminate the extra costs associated with a middleman and realize more return on your product. In exchange, it is often time and labor consuming because you may deal with several customers wanting a sole goat each. It requires a commitment to aggressively market your animals and a responsibility to reliably satisfy customer needs. It is an excellent option for farm families who enjoy socializing and/or have several on-farm products to sell.