



## Dairy goats

Farm Diversification Information Service, Bendigo

February 1998

AG0665

ISSN 1329-8062

*This Agriculture Note provides information on dairy goats and the industry.*

### Product

Whole goats' milk fills a niche market because it is easier to digest than cows milk. This means it can be of value to adults and babies unable to digest cows milk.

The major difference between goats milk and cows milk is that the fat globules are much smaller in goats milk. And a substance causing coagulation of fat globules is naturally present in cows milk but is absent in goats milk.

Goats milk is also substituted for cows milk by some people who have allergies to some proteins in cows milk. Both types of milk contain some proteins which are similar, so it is not always suitable for some people with allergies. Apart from this the two types of milk are similar in their content of milk sugars, fat and protein.

In addition to the whole milk market, goats milk is used for yoghurt and a variety of distinctively different cheeses.

There are currently fourteen goat dairies operating in Victoria. They all supply milk for cheese or yoghurt. There is no bulk pick up of milk, so producers must deliver it themselves to one of about eight cheese factories around the state.

### Physical Requirements

The most important decision to make about dairy goats is whether they will suit your lifestyle. They need to be milked twice a day for most of the year. If you are prepared to adapt your life to the milking routine, goats are very affectionate, intelligent animals that are very rewarding to work with.

Depending on the type of operation you intend to run you may be affected by government regulations. There are five broad categories of dairy goat production. These are -

1. producing milk for your own consumption on the property.
2. produce vendor producing milk, using a small milk shed and supplying a market.
3. licensed milk producer who milks in a dairy and regularly supplies milk to a processing factory.
4. stud breeding operation producing animals for hobby farmers to milk.

5. production of meat goats targeted at people of European background (Mainly Anglo Nubian goats are produced for this purpose).

Both the second and third categories will require a licence. Check with your local council about the various health and production licensing requirements *before you start*.

Housing requirements will vary depending on the size and nature of the operation. Where one or two goats are kept in a confined area, they should be provided with shelter and an exercise yard and ample feeding and water facilities.

If a full scale dairy is to be built, it is essential that you visit some operational dairies to have a look at their setup. Just like a cattle dairy they must allow for easy movement of animals through the system, yards 1400-1500 mm high, that can withstand pressure, hose down and effluent storage, and refrigerated milk storage. Specialist goat milking equipment can be purchased and occasionally it is available second hand. Complete setup costs can range from less than \$20,000 to more than \$150,000.

Where land is available for grazing, good fences are needed. Fences need to be constructed to prevent goats getting under or over them. Prefabricated fences with electric outriggers would be a fence of choice, or plain wire electric are also suitable. The fence height should be about one metre. A good water supply is essential as lactating does require good quality water, and the dairy will also have a high water requirement.

### Production

The goat herd may consist of does of various ages and kids younger than a year. The kids are reared either for sale or to increase herd size. The main breeds used in Australia are the Saanen, British Alpine and Toggenburg.

Does usually first lactate in their second year after kidding. They are normally mated about seven months after kidding so they kid every twelve months. Does are dried off about six to eight weeks before kidding to allow it to build up its body reserves again for kidding. They should be well fed in late pregnancy, and drying off should be done over a period of time.

The breeding season extends from January to August or drugs can be used to synchronise oestrus at other times.

Kids can be reared by hand until three to four months old, when they are sold as Capretto or weaned.

### Marketing

There is no established market for goats' milk. Health food stores are the largest outlet. Virtually all of the milk produced in Victoria at the moment is used for the manufacture of speciality cheeses and yoghurt. It is difficult to maintain milk supply as does kid in the spring so their peak production is in the spring and summer. Staggering the breeding program helps produce a more even flow of milk, but breeding out of season is difficult. Goat milk producers must find and service their own market. The industry has been fragmented in the past and has had a large turnover of producers.

The Herd Improvement and Producers Association (HIPA) (affiliated with the Victorian Dairy Goat Association) promotes commercial dairying and is responsible for herd recording and testing.

### Financial aspects

A good milking doe will produce milk for ten years, providing about four litres a day at her peak lactation. Some Victorian goat dairies have been established for a long time and continue to trade profitably. Several sheep dairies which also manufacture cheese and yoghurt, also milk goats, to enhance their product range. Setting up a dairy is expensive, and must conform to local planning health regulations.

Many dairy goats in Victoria are kept by breeders who sell stock to enthusiasts and to commercial dairies. Milk sells for between 60c and 80c a litre to cheese factories. Buck kids are sold for meat.

Goat dairies can be good earners, but like any dairy business they must combine good financial management with excellent animal husbandry and farm management skills. Poor business planning is the main cause of failure in a goat dairy enterprise.

### Organisations & Contacts

Herd Improvement and Producers Association (HIPA)  
Gail Abud, Ph. 03 9718 2041

Victorian Dairy Goat Association  
Secretary - Glenys Keays, Ph 03 5271 1254

### References

Seminar proceedings, covering most aspects of Goat Dairying  
available from the HIPA  
Ph. 03 9718 2041

Several good references are available on Goat Dairying.  
Department of Primary Industries Information Centre  
Ph 03 9637 8080 Fax 03 9637 8150

### Acknowledgments

Ian Knox - Alternative Directions

This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its officers do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.