



Preparing Meat Goats for Sale

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Introduction

Commercial marketing of meat goats involves identifying the market, correct husbandry and nutritional management, proper assessment of goats suitable for marketing and the correct preparation of goats prior to dispatch to the market.

This article discusses the correct preparation of meat goats prior to dispatch to the identified market.

Planning

Preparation of goats for market begins with the identification of the market being targeted. From this point a plan of the appropriate mating, nutrition and other required management practices will follow.

Market requirements can vary with seasons and between years so it is important to contact potential buyers, agents or your marketing network in advance to ensure that you clearly understand the current market requirements.

When goats are being prepared for market, the producer must time their work carefully to ensure that the buyer will accept delivery of the goats on time and according to specification. During the months prior to delivery, husbandry operations must be carefully planned to enable goats to arrive at the correct specifications and appearance. Ideally, goats delivered for slaughter will:

1. meet specification;
2. be outside any chemical withholding period;
3. be healthy;
4. be clean and dry;
5. have short fleeces ;
6. have no bruises;
7. have clear identification ;
8. be delivered in the agreed sized load;
9. be ready on time; and
10. be accompanied with a National Vendor Declaration.

1. Meet specifications

It is critical to only sell goats that closely match the specifications of the buyer. Usually buyers will specify the age, live weight or carcass weight and condition score of the goats they wish to buy. The assessment procedures required for the marketing of goats are discussed in the Agnote "Assessment skills for goat meat marketing"

Inspect

Inspect all goats being considered for sale. Reject any goat that does not match the specifications so as to avoid penalties for failing to meet specifications. If inspection occurs well before marketing you can decide if goats that are currently unsuitable will benefit from additional feeding before sale.

Measure live weight

Live weight can be directly measured on live stock scales made for the purpose. Girth tapes can be used to estimate live weight provided that they have been calibrated for goats. For producers with small numbers of animals, bathroom scales can be used. This method is only suitable for smaller animals.

Condition score

The condition or fatness of carcasses can be monitored by using body condition scoring. Farmers should learn this technique and practice it whenever goats are handled. Goats that do not have the correct condition score should not be sold. See Agriculture Note on assessing goats.

Age

The age of sale goats should be determined from your farm records or from dentition (teeth development).

2. Be outside chemical withholding periods

Producers must maintain and carefully check farm records to ensure that goats being sold will be outside the withholding periods for any chemical treatment.

In Australia, it is common for goats to be treated with veterinary drugs such as vaccines, drenches to control internal parasites and chemicals to control lice. Each chemical treatment has an associated specified withholding period. Withholding periods are designed to ensure a reasonable time period between chemical treatment and slaughter so that any chemical residues that may exist in the food are below the relevant maximum residue limit.

Maximum residue limits apply to all food products sold in Australia and are legally binding. The withholding period is printed on chemical and drug labels.

Approved products are listed on the inside cover of the National Vendor Declaration book.

Export slaughter interval

Producers selling goats destined for export need to be aware of the Export Slaughter Interval (ESI). The ESI reflect the differences between Australian and overseas maximum residue limits. The ESI will be longer than the withholding period in order to satisfy lower overseas maximum residue limits. Breaking the ESI can place producers and the entire industry at risk of trade sanctions. It is the responsibilities of producers to ensure withholding periods and ESIs are honoured. Products without goats on the label should not be used on goats for export meat production unless there is a permit for the use issued by the National Registration Authority.

3. Be healthy

Only healthy goats should be sent to market. It is a breach of the Code of Accepted Farming Practice for the Welfare of Goats (Victoria) and the Code of Practice for Welfare of Farm Animals during Transport to send sick or injured animals to market. Animals with broken limbs, broken horns or other physical injuries should be removed from any mob of goats being sold and carefully treated.

Weaning capretto kids

Capretto kids should be weaned from their mothers just prior to transport. This means that you must be well organised so as not to delay the transport carrier. Capretto kids do not have a large gut full of food. Prolonged periods of food deprivation will result in dark and dry carcasses that will be unsuitable for the capretto market.

4. Be clean and dry

Goats contaminated with mud, weed seeds, dags or scours should be cleaned up. Wet and dry dags must be removed from the breech, tail and legs.

Where practical, goats should be loaded when they are dry. If it is raining and the yards are muddy, keep stock under cover and if possible arrange to load stock out of a shed.

Fasting

Fasting means going without food and water. Goats should have access to water up until the time of shedding or yarding. Feed and water should be withheld for 12 hours prior to transport of adult goats. This will result in cleaner and safer transport and make unloading easier.

There is no advantage in having goats ready earlier as prolonged deprivation of feed and water results in a loss of body and carcass tissue weight. Weaned goats have a large gut content of food and water. During a 24-hour period of fasting, typically the gut content will decline 2 to 3 kg.

Load only into a clean transport vehicle. Do not put straw or hay onto the floor of the vehicle. Such material will blow about and become lodged in the fleece of the goats.

If you have to hold the sale goats for some time, place them in large holding yards or paddocks with ample feed, shade and water. Avoid using overhead hay racks as goats can become covered with seeds and litter.

Scouring animals

Animals suffering from scouring should be removed from the consignment. Scouring animals: foul themselves; foul other animals in the consignment; and lead to higher rates of carcass contamination that will reduce the shelf life of meat products.

Animals given a chemical treatment to stop scouring or reduce internal parasitism, cannot be sold until the withholding period has expired.

5. Have short fleeces

Goats are best sold with short fleeces, ideally less than 3 cm long. Mohair and cashmere goats should be shorn preferably 3 weeks prior to slaughter. A 3 week period will allow any cuts and bruising to heal. A short fleece will enable goats to be transported more efficiently. Mohair goats should be sold no later than 10 weeks after shearing.

A short fleece will also reduce any contamination and make slaughter more efficient. Goats destined for the "skin-on" trade should have short fleeces, as it is difficult to remove long fleece during processing.

6. Have no bruises

Bruising and dog bites result in downgrading, severe trimming or condemning of carcasses in the meat works. Bruising costs growers and marketing agents hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. Any bruising caused by, physical blows or pulling of the fleece will show on the carcass possibly leading to trimming and downgrading.

To minimise bruising, handle goats quietly and carefully. Do not use electric prodders. Ensure that there are no projections in your yards and races. Keep handling to a minimum. Do not frighten the goats with dogs, loud noises or noisy bikes.

All dogs should be muzzled.

Do not pull fleeces. Rough handling causes bruising.

Transporting

Draft goats into groups of similar sex and size.

When transporting, keep the pens small and not overcrowded. Goats tend to pack down and small pens avoid large pile-ups and suffocation of goats at the bottom.

The transport vehicle should drive and stop carefully. The vehicle should stop occasionally and the driver should check to ensure that the goats are comfortable.

Transport drivers should be familiar with the Code of Practice for Welfare of Farm Animals during Transport.

Transporters are expected to have a Quality Assurance system in place such as Truckcare. Truckcare has been developed for livestock transporters by the Australian Livestock Transporters Association.

7. Have clear identification

Clear identification of each goat supports you being paid for your product. Discuss identification with the agent before you dispatch the goats on the transport.

Identification can be with ear tags, ear notches, leg tags, raddle or colour mark on the head or horns of the goats. Do not mark the body or fleece with coloured marks as this will downgrade the value of the skin.

The National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) has been developed to ensure national recognition for your identified livestock. One benefit of NLIS identified livestock is that they cannot be lost in the system. More information on NLIS can be obtained from Meat and Livestock Australia.

If you are disposing of several grades of goats at the same time, make sure different grades are marked with different identifiers such as different colours. It is also essential that the agent knows what your identifiers mean.

8. Deliver agreed load size

It is very important to deliver the number and type of goats you agreed to sell. Agents organise their purchases to match deliveries along the supply chain. Carcasses cannot be stored for extended lengths of time and will deteriorate.

Delivering too many or too few goats or not on time causes disruption to orderly marketing arrangements. Make sure you know what you are selling by following the guidelines discussed in section 1 on specifications.

9. Ready on time

Goats should be ready for loading when the carrier arrives. Transport drivers do not appreciate long delays while they wait for you to move animals. Usually transport drivers have complex timetables to meet, in both collecting and delivering animals to a range of locations.

Please be considerate of the driver and the next farmers by having your animals handy at the agreed upon time.

10. Fill in a National Vendor Declaration

A National Vendor Declaration (NVD) form for goats must be correctly filled in before the live stock carrier arrives. A NVD allows you to guarantee the integrity of your product and provides a means of describing the product. These forms are available from agents and State Department of Primary Industry. If you are unsure about items on the NVD discuss the matter with your livestock agent. The livestock carrier should sign the NVD, take a copy and leave a copy for your records. NVDs help protect your product from being lost or sent to the wrong place.

Carriers do not want to wait while you search for or fill in the forms. Prepare them the night before. Be organised and keep a supply of the correct forms in your office.

If you will not be present when the carrier arrives, arrange for a safe and dry place for the NVD form to await collection by the carrier.

Further information

Further information can be obtained from Meat and Livestock Australia. Internet: <http://www.mla.com.au>

Codes of practice and other advisory notes on goat production can be obtained from the internet: <http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/notes>

Time table for selling

Table 1 gives the outline of routine activities to be completed before the dispatch of goats for slaughter. This table can be used as a checklist by ticking each activity when completed.

Table 1. A suggested list of routine activities to be completed before the sale of goats for meat. The table can be used as checklist by ticking each activity when completed.

Time before sale	Activity	√
6 months	Research suitable markets.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Contact agents to determine market specifications.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 months up to sale	Implement correct nutrition and husbandry practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Record chemical usage.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 weeks	Ensure compliance with any withholding periods.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Organise shearing or crutching if needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 to 5 weeks	Contact agent to reconfirm marketing arrangements.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Evaluate (weigh and condition score) all potential goats for suitability for market.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Adjust nutrition as needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 weeks	Shearing and crutching must be completed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 to 7 days	Evaluate each animal (weigh and condition score, health) for compliance with market specification. Reject animals not meeting specification.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Move to paddocks near yards.	<input type="checkbox"/>
0 to 1 day	Draft suitable animals into the agreed size sale lines.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Identify different sale lots with raddle only on head.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Adult goats given 12 hour fast.	<input type="checkbox"/>
0 to 1 day	Fill in all declaration forms.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	If wet, put into clean undercover shedding.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day of transport	Wean capretto kids before transport arrives.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Driver signs and takes copy of declaration forms.	<input type="checkbox"/>
After marketing	Make contact with agent or market group to obtain feed back on sale.	<input type="checkbox"/>

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