

## **PASTURE MANAGEMENT FOR GRAZING GOATS**

Intensive grazing of goats on high-investment pastures is usually not cost effective. An ideal way to utilize goats is to graze them with cattle in large pastures because in such situations they can be quite effective in controlling weeds and brush. They are effective in eliminating many troublesome plant species that cattle do not consume such as willow, pigweed, thistles, stinging nettle and curly dock. Goats also consume seed heads of grasses that are often ignored by cattle. Some pasture weeds such as sicklepod, bitterweed, and dogfennel are avoided by goats.

When goats are used to clear pasture areas of weeds and brush, grazing can be prolonged until these species are destroyed. However, if brush vines and weeds are used as a long-term resource, rotational stocking will be needed to allow these species time to recover.

On most farms, supplemental pasture species will likely be needed to supply adequate forage for meat goats during at least part of the year. It is important to supply a higher level of nutrition including 14 percent protein in diets to does in late pregnancy and early lactation. As far as forage grasses, goats like to forage on bahiagrass and pearl millet but find bermudagrass to be less palatable. Rye, wheat, and annual ryegrass are suitable, but clovers are often ignored. Poisonous plants are usually not a problem for goats with an adequate feed supply.

Parasites are a major problem with goats in the more humid climate such as our area when they are confined to small areas of pasture at a high stocking rate. They can particularly become a serious problem in closely grazed pastures of species such as bahiagrass. Taller growing species or forages that are less closely grazed allow for less contact between the animal and the ground during grazing. The best line of defense against a parasite infestation is using an appropriate stocking rate and rotational stocking which allows pastures to rest between grazing periods. Implementing a sound deworming program is a second line of defense against parasites.

Predators such as coyotes can be particularly harmful to goats but feral dogs or neighborhood dogs can also cause problems with kids and even adult animals. Penning goats up at night is one option; however, donkeys also make good guardians and will keep predators out of the area. Electric fencing is also helpful. Goats are intelligent animals. They can be trained to electric fences by placing them in a small pasture enclosed by a five or six foot wire fence with the bottom wires 6 inches apart and the top one at 4 feet. Once they are trained, goats can be easily contained by three-wire electric fences placed at 10, 20 and 36 inches apart.

For more information on pasture managements of goats, contact the Pierce County Extension Service at 449-2034.