

Production of Sheep and Goats

SHEEP and goat production is unique. It ranges from hobby farms to farm flocks to huge range flocks. It includes the raising of animals for meat, fleece, milk, or pets. Some production systems have intense management, while others have little to no management. Sheep and goat production offers a wide variety of systems that can fit into any environment.



(Courtesy, Agricultural Research Service, USDA)

Objective:



Compare and contrast production systems for sheep and goats.

Key Terms:



dairy production system
farm flock production system
feedlot production system
hobby production system
purebred flock production system
range band production system

Types of Production Systems

FARM FLOCK

The **farm flock production system** involves flocks that are small to medium in size and have medium to higher levels of management. Examples of this type of production system are found throughout the United States but are most common in the Midwest and in the eastern states. The management of a farm flock is easier than that of a larger flock. This is because the

number of animals is smaller and because facilities are usually available for lambing or kidding, health processing, castration, and shearing. For example, mohair-producing goats must be sheared twice a year, so smaller numbers of animals and adequate facilities are necessary. A farm flock can range from 20 to 200 animals.

Farm flocks are typically crossbred animals used for meat or fleece production, or both. Some farm flocks may consist of crossbred females bred to a purebred male to utilize better genetics.

Farm flocks typically graze pasturelands that are enclosed with fences. Their diets may be supplemented with other feeds. Offspring from a farm flock are either marketed to feedlots or fed to market weight on the farm.

Because predators can be a problem for a farm flock, a guard dog may be used. The guard dog lives with the animals for its entire life, and its sole purpose is to protect the animals.

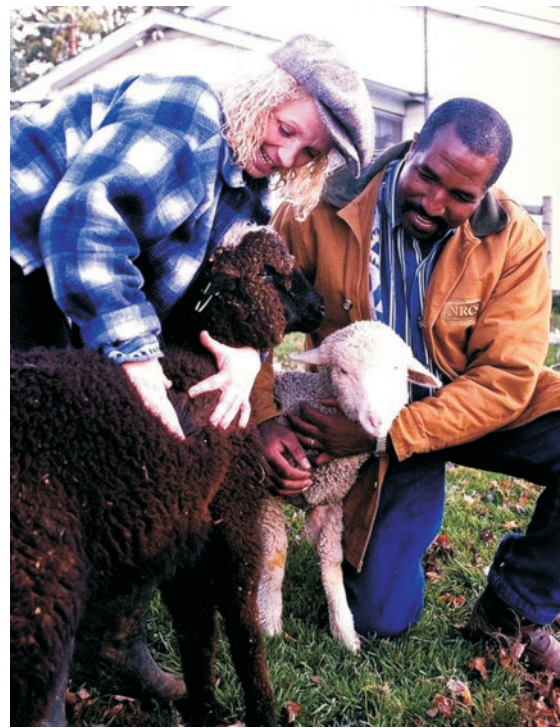


FIGURE 1. The small to medium size of a farm flock production system allows for ease in handling animals. (Courtesy, Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA)

RANGE BAND

The **range band production system** involves the raising of sheep, goats, or both in large numbers. This type of production system is found most commonly in the western and southern states, where rangelands are highly available for large numbers of animals. Range band production is used in mountainous terrain and the poorer range areas of Texas, New Mexico, and other states.

Numbers for a range band can be from several hundred to thousands of animals. Management of a range band is typically very low level because the animals may be grazing many miles from the nearest working facility and the number of animals makes it difficult to give individual care.

Typically, range band animals eat little or no feed other than what they gather through grazing.

Range bands are designed to utilize the naturally inherited grouping trait of sheep and goats. They travel together and rarely spread over a larger than necessary area to graze.

A common practice for range band production is the use of a shepherd and dogs. The shepherd and dogs protect the animals from predators, move the sheep or goats to the best grazing areas, and, most important, keep the animals together.

Range band production can be for either single or multiple use, with meat and/or fleece production being the most common. It is also used in the southern states as a method of brush and vegetation control. Goats are suitable for this, as they are not selective grazers and tend to like vegetation that is not desired by other species of animals.

Offspring from range band production systems may either be marketed as feeder animals sold to feedlots or be sent directly to processing plants. Offspring sold directly to processing plants originate from high-quality range areas.

PUREBRED FLOCK

The **purebred flock production system** is similar to the farm flock system in the number of animals involved, but it utilizes a single breed. It requires management at a very high standard.

The animals rarely have to graze aggressively for food and are typically supplemented a large portion of their diet. A breeding program is used to produce superior animals within the breed, and offspring are marketed as show stock or seed stock. Premiums can be achieved from purebred animals.

Purebred breeders can be found throughout the United States but are most common in the far eastern, eastern, midwestern, and southern states. Rarely do purebred breeders raise animals as a sole source of income but more as a supplemental base.



FIGURE 2. Goats graze vegetation not typically consumed by other animals. (Courtesy, Agricultural Research Service, USDA)

FEEDLOT

The **feedlot production system** is designed to feed sheep or goats to market weight. Animals are purchased from farm flocks and range bands at weaning and fed until they reach a weight desired by processing plants. The sole purpose of this type of production system is to take animals from weaning to market for meat production.

Feedlots range from small to very large. The smaller feedlots are found in the East and Midwest, while the larger feedlots are found in the South and West.

Animals are fed a high-quality diet that maximizes their growth and their ability to produce desirable carcasses. The management level of a feedlot production system can range from moderate to very high, depending on the size of the operation and the available labor.

Some feedlots market animals to be sold into specialty, or niche, markets. Such markets include those for organic, free-range, antibiotic-free, and steroid-free animals. This type of marketing allows for premiums to be achieved but may involve additional management practices.

DAIRY

The **dairy production system** for both sheep and goats has gained popularity in recent years. It is more common in other countries, where dairy cows are not readily available and

feed for larger animals is not easily obtainable. A medium to large number of dairy sheep and goats is needed for the high cost of milking equipment to be practical. Management of dairy sheep and goats must be high level to keep the producing females in good health. The milk typically goes to specialty markets, where gourmet cheeses and highly digestible milk are in demand.

Sheep and goats are milked for a shorter time than dairy cows before they are dried off and rebred. With proper management, the system can be set up so that all animals are on the same milking cycle and dried off within a few days of each other. This allows for a seasonal production period and reduces the time demand of the dairy cow industry.

HOBBY

The **hobby production system** for sheep and goats has rapidly gained popularity in the United States. It involves raising fewer than 20 animals on a small farm or ranch. Hobby production's sole purpose is to satisfy a love for animals by people while utilizing the opportunity to graze small acreage. Rarely do hobby producers raise any other agricultural products. They tend to break even or even lose money on their production system.

Sheep and goats are popular in hobby production systems because of their ease of handling and their ability to survive in low- to high-level management situations. FFA and 4-H projects would typically fall into this category as they expose young people to animals through all production phases. Pet sheep and goats can also be raised in hobby systems. Specialty and unique breeds are common in this type of production system. Offspring produced can be marketed to either petting zoos or feedlots to gain a small return on the investment in the animals.

Summary:



Sheep and goat production systems offer the ability to utilize from just a few acres up to several hundred or thousand acres of rangeland. Sheep and goats can be raised as a sole source of income, for supplemental income, or as a hobby. Crossbred and purebred animals can be found in many of these production systems, depending on the objective of a particular operation. Management requirements vary with the type of production system.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Explain why management is typically low level for range band production.
2. How is milk utilized in dairy production systems?
3. Explain the differences between farm flock production and hobby production.

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Go to a supermarket in or near your local community to see if you can find dairy products made from sheep's or goat's milk. Take note of the processing facility and of the price variation between cow products and sheep or goat products. When you return home or to school, look up the processing facility and see where it is. Compare the location of the facility with the location where a large percentage of sheep and goats are raised. Prepare a report for your classmates or an article for the local newspaper.

Web Links:



Sheep and Goats in Vegetation Control

<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/sheep.htm>

Goat Cheese

<http://whatscookingamerica.net/goatcheesetips.htm>

Sheep and Goat Hobby Production Systems

<http://www.hobbyfarmsmagazine.com/hf/>

Agricultural Career Profiles

<http://www.mycaert.com/career-profiles>