

# DAIRY GOATS

## Introduction

The image of the goat has undergone a transformation in recent years. Consumer knowledge of production values has increased exponentially and has fuelled a demand for healthy, quality products, such as goats' milk and cheeses. Goats' milk has long been associated with certain health benefits, particularly in the case of asthma and eczema. However, due to its chemical and physical properties, it is also much more readily digestible by the human body. Goats' cheese, rarely found on menus 20 years ago, has become a firm favourite with the Irish palate and is now commonplace in restaurants. Yoghurts, ice cream and even cosmetics can all be made from goats' milk.

### An outlet for milk is critical

The biggest challenge for anyone who wishes to enter dairy goat farming is finding a secure, consistent outlet for the milk. There is only one major liquid milk processor in Ireland, but a number of medium- and large-scale cheese producers. Making contact with some of these processors will quickly give you an indication if there is an existing market for your milk. It may also be possible to

Because goats can be carried at a relatively high stocking rate on small acreages, with a good system and steady outlet, they can be profitable. However, dairy goats are particularly soft, with little weatherproofing and little resistance to parasites, so must be at least offered shelter from the Irish climate. Therefore, most commercial dairy herds in Ireland are housed indoors all year round and either zero grazed or fed silage. The typical diet is much the same as dairy cows – forage supplemented with meal. Goat kids are particularly delicate and require a lot of work to ensure their survival. For these reasons in particular, goat farming would have to be considered labour intensive.

develop a product through working with a local processor or cheese maker that is expanding their product range or level of production. Therefore contacting other dairy product manufacturers, even if not currently producing a goat-related product, may be beneficial. Details of some farms and processors are available here: <http://teagascgoatblog.blogspot.ie/p/the-irish-goat-hub.html>.

### Facts and figures

- An initial target for yield should be 750 litres per 300-day lactation;
- some top-quality herds produce in excess of 1,000 litres per lactation;
- typical prices received for milk are 65c-75c per litre;
- a net margin of €100 per milking goat should be achievable;
- year-round production is usually required to meet processor demands; and,
- most milk produced in the north midlands is supplied to Glenisk, with milk in the rest of the country usually supplied to cheese makers.

### Did you know?

- The main breeds used for milk production in Ireland are Saanen, Toggenburg, Alpine and Nubian;
- goats are very selective eaters and any uneaten feed must be removed daily;
- some high-yielding goats do not have to be bred each year and can be milked on for a number of years; and,
- bucks smell strongly at breeding time and the bulk tank must be maintained at a certain distance to ensure the milk does not become tainted.

## Establishing your dairy goat enterprise

### Some important steps

#### Establishing a market for your milk

As mentioned above, the biggest challenge for anyone who wishes to enter dairy goat farming is finding a secure, consistent outlet for the milk. Without this outlet, beginning dairy goat farming is an ill-advised and costly exercise.

#### Visit well-run, profitable farms

Out of courtesy, this should always be done by appointment. You should visit as many as possible. This is time consuming but invaluable.

Each farm will have different facilities and management practices, and you should make notes on which would be most relevant and useful on your farm.

#### Plan your facilities

Drawings of sheds, parlours and other facilities should be available from your farm advisor, as will guidance with regard to planning permission. Ensure that any works you undertake comply with Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) specifications on goat buildings and facilities. Existing sheds and buildings can sometimes be modified to accommodate goats and associated facilities.

#### Get a mentor

One of the greatest challenges to setting up a goat enterprise is finding a ready supply of good information. This is particularly the case in Ireland, where the industry is small and widespread. If at all possible try to develop a

relationship with an experienced goat farmer.

This person may be able to answer a lot of questions you will undoubtedly have and may have other contacts that will be invaluable to you.

#### Sourcing goats

A goat enterprise can fail due to poor health, quality and performance in the foundation stock; therefore, be extremely cautious when sourcing animals for your herd. Always try to purchase the best quality animals possible, but it is vital that animals only come from healthy herds. Sourcing goats can sometimes be difficult, so contact a number of farms well in advance to discuss the potential purchase of animals. Importing goats can be costly and highly restricted on health grounds.

### Teagasc training

Teagasc provides a 25-hour Introduction to Goat Farming course for those interested in taking up the enterprise.

Teagasc also has a broad suite of training options for anyone considering developing a food product with food innovation, cheese making and food safety among those available.

You can find information on many of these courses on [www.teagasc.ie](http://www.teagasc.ie) or by registering through [www.opt-in.ie](http://www.opt-in.ie).

### DAFM requirements and supports

In order to keep goats in Ireland you must be registered with the DAFM. If you do not currently have a herd number, you must contact your local Regional Veterinary Office for a registration form – ER1 (or download one from the DAFM website). Once completed, an official will inspect your holding to ensure it is suitable for keeping goats. After you are issued with your herd number, you can order tags for your goats. (Identification and tagging requirements can be downloaded here:

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealth/welfare/animalidentificationmovement/natio>

[nationalgoatidentificationsystem/](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealth/welfare/animalidentificationmovement/nationalgoatidentificationsystem/)).

Grant aid is currently available for goat housing and milking facilities. The rate is typically 40%. The requirements and specifications are available on the DAFM website: [www.agriculture.gov.ie](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie).

**Table 1: A greenfield dairy unit will cost per head (€) (based on a 200-animal unit).**

Stock	258
Dairy facilities and collecting yard	479
Housing	444
Total investment per animal	1,181

#### Further information

For further information, please contact Cian Condon, Environment and Technology Advisor – Drystock and Goats at:

+353 (0)719855203

[cian.condon@teagasc.ie](mailto:cian.condon@teagasc.ie)

The following resources are also helpful:

<https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/goats/>

<http://teagascgoatblog.blogspot.com/p/the-irish-goat-hub.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/Irish-Goat-Producers-Association-148588291885911/>

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[www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev](http://www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev)

