

Marketing Goats & Sheep

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Meat – The primary product from goats and sheep is meat. There is a demand for animals of all ages, weights and qualities (unlike beef, pork and poultry that have well defined carcass and quality targets). Market price is influenced by supply and demand, dressing percentage and the carcass quality of the animal offered for sale. Neither the goat or lamb meat trade has a use for excessively fat animals.



Most goat and lamb is sold bone-in. Packers generally sell young goats as whole carcasses, which then may be quartered for retail presentation. Fabrication specifications for retail products can vary significantly, depending on consumer group preferences. Older goats are usually processed and sold as bone-in cubes.

Small lambs may be presented for retail sale similar to kid goats. Heavier lambs (>50 lb carcass) are generally fabricated in to the four retail cuts (leg, loin, rack and shoulder), each of which may be further fabricated before sale.

	Age	Teeth	Typical Range for Live Weight, lb*	
			Goats	Sheep
Kid, lamb	0-11 months	milk (baby) teeth	15-70	15-80
Yearling	12-23 months	1 pair permanent	60-120	75-150
Young	24-36 months	2-3 pair permanents	90-180	90-200
Mature	4-6 years old	4 pair permanents	100-200	90-225
Aged	7+ years old	worn, broken mouth	100+	90+

* Includes all species of goats and sheep respectively.

Offal – Offal includes the head, skin, shanks and viscera. Some consumers enjoy dishes prepared from the head, organ meats and/or the viscera. Goat and sheep skins yield very high quality leather. Most fresh skins are salted and exported 'raw' to other countries (ex. Mexico) for tanning.

Market Timing – Most goats and lambs are born in the spring and come to market mid-summer to late fall. Consequently, supply often exceeds demand during late summer and early fall and prices soften. Kid and lamb prices are historically the highest from mid-November through the Easter holidays. Holidays and religious celebrations often drive market prices higher (see Table 2).

Table 2. Noteworthy Marketing Opportunities* – Goats & Lambs		
Consumer Preference		
Holiday	Goat	Lamb
Easter Western Apr 4, 2010 Greek Apr 4, 2010	young, milk fed <40 lb liveweight	30-55 lb live weight, fat
Passover Mar 29 - Apr 5, 2010		30-55 lb live weight, fat no blemishes
Rosh Hashana Sep 9, 2010		forequarters, from 60-110 lb live weight
Ramadan Aug 11 – Sep 9 2010	no permanent teeth 45-80 lb live weight	60-80 lb live weight
Id al-Fitr Sep 9, 2010	"	"
Id al-Adha Nov 16, 2010	"	prefer blemish free yearlings, 60-100 lb
Caribbean Holidays August	yearlings and older intact bucks preferred, 80 lb+	
Christmas	young, 15-25 lb live weight	young, 15-25 lb live weight
Cinco de Mayo May 5	grilling size, usually <60 lb live weight	
Memorial Day May 30, 2010	"	
July 4 th	"	
Labor Day Sep 6, 2010	"	
*To capitalize on these opportunities, animals must usually be marketed 7-10 days before the holiday/event occurs.		

Visit with your goat/sheep marketing professionals regarding these and other marketing opportunities.

Breeding Stock – Kids, lambs and yearlings of acceptable quality and confirmation can often be sold at a premium to their value as a slaughter animal. If using the services of a commission company, let the marketing professionals know you are bringing quality replacement breeding animals, thus providing them an opportunity to promote your consignment. When culling breeding females (especially does), if forage conditions permit, allow thin females to gain some condition and udders to dry up before marketing. Thin does with distended udders have little market value. May is historically the worst month of the year to sell cull ewes.

Market Observations

- Regardless of age, healthy, well conditioned animals top the market. Unhealthy, lethargic or thin animals are generally discounted.

- Sell when it rains (or other inclement weather that restrict the numbers coming to a weekly auction market).
- Sell when nobody else does.
- An 'optimum' live weight for young slaughter goats is 60 lbs.
- Goat kids weighing 46-49 pounds are difficult to sell. In this narrow weight range, goats are too heavy for the traditional 'cabrito' market and too light for the markets on the coasts and in the northeast. Maximum live weight for the cabrito market is 38-42 pounds.
- Castrate male goats/lambs. Wethers/muttons sell well any time of the year and will bring "top dollar all day". Although opportunities exist to sell intact male goats/lambs for a premium (to castrates), these opportunities occur infrequently and are relatively small in size (number of head required). Another justification for castrating young lambs or goats to eliminate the possibility of ewe lambs or doe kids breeding prematurely.
- Woolled breed lambs (finewools, medium wools and crosses) remain in demand, both as feeders and fats.
- An 'optimum' target slaughter weight for hair lambs is 60-70 pounds.
- Compared to the woolled breeds, the hair sheep are earlier maturing and fatten very quickly. Consequently, harvest weight for fed hair lambs (with 0.5 inches of backfat or less) will seldom exceed 100-120 pounds.
- The summer months (June – September) are generally a difficult time to sell hair lambs and market prices are usually at their annual low.

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