Guide to Starting a Commercial Goat Dairy Now Available for Interested Farmers

Turning a passion into a viable business is a line-in-the-sand decision, and a new book by Northeast SARE Farmer Grant Specialist Carol Delaney, *A Guide to Starting a Commercial Goat Dairy*, covers what farmers should consider when planning a goat dairy startup. It also fills a gap—there are many periodicals and books with information about cow dairying, and this adds some needed weight on the small ruminant side of the scale.

Delaney has taken information developed over her ten years as the Vermont small ruminant dairy specialist and enriched it with practical, science-based information. Topics are illustrated with many photos and tables and include time and financial management, recordkeeping, goat selection, the cost of raising replacements, nutrition, grazing and marketing.

Delaney wrote most of the chapters, but there are also contributors from Extension, the Vermont Dairy Herd Improvement Association, Vermont Butter and Cheese Creamery, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, and private dairy consultants. These chapters offer material on equipment, barn and cheese facilities, udder health, out-of-season breeding, and milk measurement recording. The guide ends with a list of recommended books and contacts that draws on local, national, and international resources.

The result is a clear, close look at the needs of dairy goats and how goat farms connect to regional milk, meat, and livestock markets, along with an emphasis on how to set up records that measure success in terms of time and money.

And while the guide was written with the Vermont farmer in mind and includes contributions from Vermont farmers, the content will be useful to any farmer in the Northeast.

Delaney’s travels in Canada and Europe let her include recommendations for efficient milking parlor design, kid feeding, and barn cleaning from these non-US sources, and there is also advice on recordkeeping specific to taxes, costs of production, business planning, and even exiting the business, an often overlooked subject. Whether you want to sell
fluid milk from a large 400-goat dairy or make cheese from a 40-goat operation, the guide will give equipment lists and space requirements that scale up or down and draw on both local and international sources.

The underlying philosophy draws on the principles of holistic management, which emphasizes that all parties, including the ones working off the farm, are planners and participants during startup. Delaney puts an emphasis on the culture in agriculture, which encourages farmers to expand and share their knowledge with other farmers and the community, and to only operate the farm if they continue to love and enjoy the work.

A Guide to Starting a Commercial Goat Dairy runs 160 pages and was funded by the University of Vermont Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Vermont Sheep and Goat Association, US Department of Agriculture Risk Management Agency, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, and Vermont Butter and Cheese Creamery. It's available in print from the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture for $25 (includes shipping), and can be downloaded free using this link.

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Established in 1994, the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture provides timely information to Vermont communities and the UVM campus. The Center cultivates partnerships, supports innovative research and practices, and informs policy to advance sustainable food and farming systems. For more information, contact Linda Berlin at the Center: 656-0669 or linda.berlin@uvm.edu.