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Vermont Dairy Goat Report

Tier 2: Mid-Scale Producer Profile (151–249 Does)

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About This Publication Series

This report focuses on Vermont dairy goat producers operating in the **small commercial range of 151 to 249 milking does.** Data are drawn from a Vermont producer survey conducted by UVM Extension. Financial benchmarks draw on results from DAIRY GOAT TRANS version 2.25, a national benchmark tool (Tranel, ISU Extension, 2024).

This tier of producers occupies a distinct operational position: they have moved beyond small-scale seasonal production and taken on year-round supply complexity but have not yet reached the scale that achieves better efficiency on fixed costs, therefore not experiencing the improved profitability from larger economies of scale.

This report is based on the data available and demonstrates important data gaps and shortfalls in publicly available financial information to describe this business model. Ongoing research is needed to better represent the current conditions on Vermont goat dairy farms. This series of publications on different scales of dairy goat business profiles is intended to spotlight the key financial and management indicators used to evaluate farm business performance. These indicators can be used by managers and prospective dairy owners to understand the challenges and opportunities to goat dairy viability. For this series, we will examine feedback from survey respondents that fit into the following tiers:

Tier	Does	Description
T1	27–150	Mid-scale commercial
T2	151–249	Mid-scale commercial (this publication)
T3	250–500	Large commercial

Tier 2 farms in this dataset average 211 peak milkers. There were only 4 farms contributing data to this study. Standard deviations are large relative to means. All figures should be treated as directional rather than statistically stable. Do not use these means as precise benchmarks without acknowledging the small sample. **Please interpret all means with caution. Treat all data in this report as informational, not definitive.**

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Key Findings

Largest Aspiration Gap of Any Tier

Farmers were asked what their peak number of milking does are currently, and what their goal amounts were. Tier 2 farms are operating at 57% of their stated peak milker goal, the largest gap of any tier in the survey. These farms are clearly building toward a larger operation. This leads us to ask the following:

- Are producers being held back from their goals by certain constraints?
- Are they seeing opportunities that encourage new aspirational goals?
- How are producers handling the managerial and financial burden of a high-head count of non-producing does?
- Was the data collected at a moment when most farms of this size have reached a point where they feel compelled to grow?

Per-Doe Production Is Below the Survey Average

Tier 2 farms average 1,525 lbs. of milk per doe per year, 24% below the all-tier mean (n = 16) of 2,009 lbs. and well below the GOAT TRANS HP benchmark of 2,300 lbs. Given that grain inputs are similar to other tiers, the gap appears to be due to genetic and management factors rather than feed inputs. We also must refer to the small sample size in the study. Many factors could influence this number.

High Replacement Stock Suggests Expansion Intent

Replacement does average 34.5% of herd at Tier 2, the highest replacement rate in the survey. Combined with the large aspiration gap, this points to farms that are actively preparing to scale but have not yet converted replacement stock into milking capacity. One in three animals on a Tier 2 farm is a replacement animal not yet in production, a significant capital and feed cost carrying load.

Labor Efficiency is Far from National Average

The estimated does-per-FTE ratio of 49 to 57 for Tier 2 farms falls well below the GOAT TRANS benchmark of 150 to 200. Industry feedback cites this gap could be the result of inefficiencies in milking systems. Other factors are the distribution of labor hours across one or more key activities like milking, replacement raising, kidding management, and general farm operations.

Parlor at Blue Ledge Farm in Salisbury, VT

Survey Data: Tier 2 vs. All Tiers

Table 1. Herd Composition

Variable	Tier 2 (n=4)	All Tiers
Animal Counts (mean)		
Peak milking does	211	243
Dry does	26	43
Replacement does	133	118
Breeding bucks	6	9
Meat goats / wethers	10	2.5
% of Total Herd (Tier 2)		
Peak milking does	54%	58%
Dry does	7%	10%
Replacement does	35%	28%
Breeding bucks	1%	2%
Meat goats / wethers	3%	1%
Capacity and Goals		
Goat milkers at peak	369	345
Peak-to-goal ratio	0.57	0.70
Gap: goal minus actual (does)	158	104

Table 2. Milk Production

Variable	Tier 2 (n=4)	All Tiers (n=16)
Avg. Milk /doe /yr (lbs)	1,525	2,009
Est. annual herd production (lbs)	287,208	N/A
Lactation length (days)	501	423
Adult cull rate	1.75	2.06

Table 3. Grain Inputs (lbs / head / day)

Variable	Tier 2 (n=4)	All Tiers (n=16)
Milking does	3.25	3.41
Dry does	1.00	1.13
Kids	1.00	0.96

Table 4. Labor

Variable	Tier 2 (n=4)	All Tiers (n=16)
Total employees	4.0	4.1
Family FT	2.0	1.6
Family PT	1.7	1.3
Non-family FT	—	1.5
Non-family PT	1.0	2.5
Estimated total FTE	3.7	5
Lowest hourly rate	$14.67	$16.75
Highest hourly rate	$16.00	$20.42

Table 5. Kidding Seasonality (%)

Variable	Tier 2 (n=4)	All Tiers (n=16)
Spring	41.0%	67.2%

Table 6. Business Context

Variable	Tier 2 (n=4)	All Tiers (n=16)
Years in business	9	10

Comparison to GOAT TRANS

The GOAT TRANS 200-milker Vermont model provides the closest available financial benchmark for Tier 2 operations. Production benchmarks are shown below; financial data were not collected in this survey. GOAT TRANS figures reflect data from "high-producing" farm data collected from the Northeast US region and adjusted to a Vermont 200-doe operating scenario at $60/cwt milk price. Financial benchmarks draw on results from DAIRY GOAT TRANS version 2.25, a national benchmark tool (Tranel, ISU Extension, 2024).

Table 7. Production Benchmark Comparison

Metric	Tier 2 Survey	GOAT TRANS 200-Doe
Milk / doe /yr (lbs)	1,525	2,300
Est. herd production (lbs)	287,208	471,447
Peak milkers	211	200 (modeled)
Location length (days)	501	Not specified
Does / FTE (est.)	49–57	150–200
Lbs. milk sold / FTE	78,000	>400,000

Table 8. Financial Benchmarks (GOAT TRANS 200-Doe)

GOAT TRANS was used to generate estimations based on collected benchmark data for a 200-milker Vermont model. Income based on $60/cwt of fluid milk. Goat dairy managers can insert numbers representing their own business in the "Your Dairy" column for comparison

Metric	Your Dairy	GOAT TRANS 200-Doe results
Milk sales / doe		$1,200
Purchased feed cost / doe		$700
Total Cash Income		$257,000
Total Cash Expense		$240,000
Net farm income		$79,000
Return on Assets (ROA)		12.1%
Break-even / cwt sold		**$55.38**

What the Comparison Tells Us

The Production Gap

Tier 2 farms produce 1,525 lbs. per doe per year against a GOAT TRANS benchmark of 2,300 lbs. Closing that gap on a 200-doe herd would add roughly 166,000 lbs. of annual production, worth approximately $99,600 in additional milk revenue at $60/cwt. That improvement alone would more than close the distance between the current Tier 2 profile and the GOAT TRANS model's net farm income of $69,550. While we understand our data doesn't gather the complete picture, it's worth considering what farms can do to improve milk production. One common theme we've heard is **improving genetics.**

Labor Context

The GOAT TRANS benchmark of greater than 400,000 lbs. of milk sold per FTE reflects operations where labor is deployed at a scale and efficiency that Vermont Tier 2 farms have not yet reached. At an estimated 78,000 lbs. per FTE, Vermont Tier 2 producers are managing roughly one worker for every 57 does, a ratio that reflects not just current herd size but the full scope of what that labor is actually doing. These farms are running year-round kidding programs, managing a replacement herd that represents 34% of total animals, plus other operational obligations. Vermont agricultural wages, year-round operational demands, and the cost of living in the region make that assumption difficult to apply directly. A Vermont Tier 2 producer interpreting these benchmarks should treat the labor metrics as a long-range target rather than a near-term standard.

The Debt Assumption

All GOAT TRANS models carry essentially zero debt. A Vermont producer purchasing or building a 200-doe operation is looking at a materially different financial structure. The GOAT TRANS benchmarks are most useful as operational performance targets for an established operation, not as startup or acquisition projections. Estimates from GOAT TRANS explain that capital investments of around $350,000 could finance a new 200-doe dairy.

Implications for Tier 2 Producers

The Transition Challenge

The most important planning distinction for a Tier 1 producer is whether their primary revenue model is commodity fluid milk, value-added cheese, or a hybrid of both. Each model carries a different cost structure, different labor demands, different licensing and regulatory requirements, and a different financial performance framework. Applying commodity benchmarks to a cheesemaking operation will understate revenue potential and skew cost priorities. Tier 1 producers should build their financial analysis around their actual market channel first and use commodity benchmarks only as an input reference.

Per-Doe Production: The Central Challenge

The 24% production gap for this tier compared to the all-tier mean leads us into examining whether genetics and management styles could play a role. We also understand that our sample size is small and errors may have taken place. Closing this gap from 1,525 to 2,300 lbs. per doe on a 200-doe herd would add roughly 166,000 lbs. of annual production, worth approximately $99,600 in additional milk revenue at $60/cwt. Emerging considerations for Vermont dairy goat producers are: what specific genetic, nutritional, or management steps are most realistic for Vermont producers to take?

Parlor Utilization: Closing the Gap

With an average goal of 369 milkers and a current peak of 211, Tier 2 farms are milking 57% of their intended herd. The milking parlor, typically the most expensive infrastructure asset, is underutilized. A practical planning exercise is to calculate the herd average required at full parlor capacity to meet financial goals, then work backward to a genetics and replacement strategy.

Year-Round Production: Managing Complexity

The shift to distributed kidding is a marker of commercial maturity but introduces costs that spring-focused operations do not carry: additional labor cover-

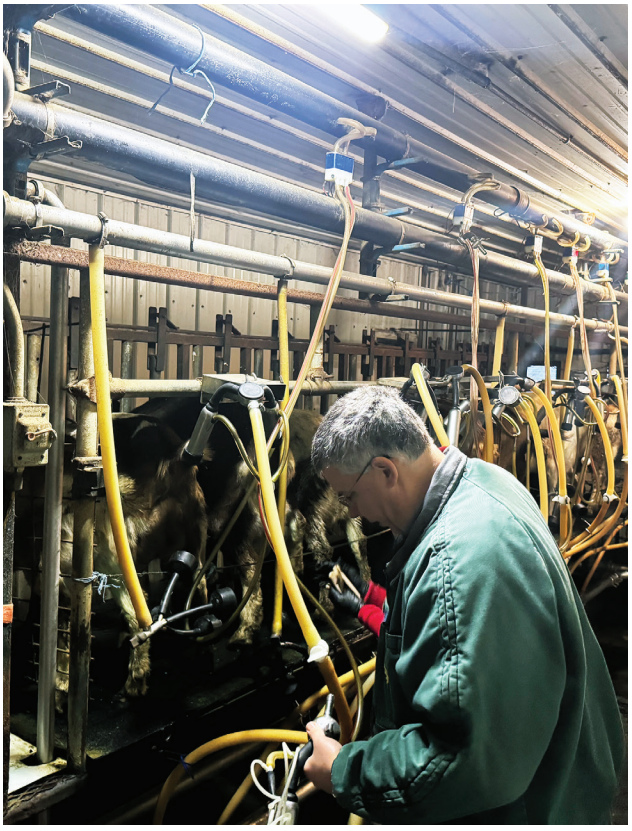
age, higher out-of-season breeding management, and more complex ration and housing demands through winter. Farms making this transition without adequate staffing or facility preparation are at higher risk of production and health problems.

Labor: Workforce Investment and Sustainability

The Tier 2 wage range of $14.67 to $16.00 per hour is below prevailing Vermont agricultural wage rates and below the all-tier survey average. For an operation managing year-round production, below-market wages create retention risk and may signal that the farm's labor model is not sustainable at its intended scale. Our team must take a closer look at the disparity between Vermont dairy goat farm labor statistics and the regional and national benchmarks.

Feed Strategy: Efficiency Over Volume

Grain inputs at Tier 2 are comparable to the all-tier sample, yet per-doe production is substantially lower. The relevant metric is feed cost per lb. of milk produced, not feed cost per doe. Improving per-doe production without increasing feed inputs would directly improve this ratio and the farm's overall profitability. This data, once again, leads us to consider feed quality, management practices, and genetics.



Dr. Paul Virkler testing equipment in a parlor

Recommendations for Managers

Vermont's Tier 2 dairy goat farms are navigating a transition that is harder here than in most other dairy goat producing regions. The jump from spring-seasonal to year-round production requires processor relationships that are still developing in Vermont's relatively small goat milk market, labor at wages that exceed the national benchmarks used in this study, and capital investment in facilities that can be relatively more expensive in Vermont compared to other regions. The genetic improvement timeline is longer in Vermont than in the Midwest, where a more developed industry provides better access to AI professionals, proven breeders, and performance-tested animals. Tier 2 farms are doing this work largely on their own, building toward a scale that national benchmarks say should be profitable while managing a Vermont cost structure those benchmarks do not fully account for.

References

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Bentley, J., Busch, R., and Tranel, L. (2024). Profitability of the California Dairy Goat Industry Study in 2024. ISU Extension / UC Davis ANR.

DAIRY GOAT TRANS ver. 2.26. Tranel, L. ISU Extension. Copyright 2026.

Vermont Dairy Goat Producer Survey. UVM Extension Agricultural Business Team. n=16 total; n=4 Tier 1. (In review)

Special thanks to the farm owners that participated in the survey.