

12-1-2004

Development of a Task Force to Provide Education and Leadership to an Emerging Industry

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Recommended Citation

Fisher, J., Nye, L., & Mangione, D. (2004). Development of a Task Force to Provide Education and Leadership to an Emerging Industry. *The Journal of Extension*, 42(6), Article 26.

<https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol42/iss6/26>

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Development of a Task Force to Provide Education and Leadership to an Emerging Industry

Abstract

The Ohio Meat Goat Task Force is a model for engaging resources and building leadership capacity to generate income and enhance sustainability of farm businesses. The collaboration of multi-disciplinary faculty, producers, allied industry, ethnic cultures, and various agencies combines expertise and leadership with applied experience to foster entrepreneurship. Grants have been secured to research ethnic market preferences, processing infrastructure and capacity, and economically viable production systems. Education provides farm businesses capacity to build leadership, share knowledge, and network resources to capture value-added marketing opportunities.

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Background

Interest in meat goats has grown rapidly over the past 10 years. Goat is the most frequently consumed meat in the world. In the United States, meat goat production is increasing because of goats' economic value as efficient converters of low-quality forages into quality meat, milk, and hide products for many specialty markets. Preference for goats is growing in populations of health conscious, ethnic, and faith based consumers. National estimates indicate current demand for meat goats is nearly 500,000 head deficient. Goats are growing in popularity as a youth project, and many are raising meat goats for breeding or show.

These interests are leading to viable, commercial, value-added enterprises. Where resources are limited, meat goats may be a livestock that a small farmer can raise efficiently and profitably, enabling them to become self-sufficient.

Engaging Resources

While meat goat production has been increasing, this enterprise did not have supporting infrastructure relative to a commodity-based organization, university-sponsored education and research, or well-known marketing channels. To address these needs, a task force has been formed and directed by personnel of The Ohio State University Extension that consists of producers, multi-disciplinary OSU faculty, ethnic and faith-based community leaders, other state universities and colleges, Allied Industry, and other interested persons. The mission of the Ohio Meat Goat Industry Task Force is to enhance the production and marketing of meat goats through education and practical experience.

The objectives of the Ohio Meat Goat Industry Task Force are:

- Identify and access emerging ethnic markets having a preference for goat meat in their diet.
- Develop producer networks, alliances, and/or cooperatives to meet the demands of emerging markets.
- Provide leadership for education and research.

Extension members of the task force have been instrumental in developing educational materials and events. County agents published the *Ohio Meat Goat Production and Budgeting Fact Sheet*, which has been adopted by over 400 producers, as a guide for establishing this value-added enterprise. Agents have designed and conducted regional workshops, seminars, and on-farm tours to transfer knowledge to over 800 participants. Extension personnel led producers on a study tour of eastern Pennsylvania and New York State markets. Several task force members have participated in a collaborative multi-state initiative for marketing and production of meat goats.

The need for current information prompted the development of the *Buckeye Meat Goat Newsletter* that is received by 500 producers. A Web site is being developed to enhance the exchange of production and marketing information to allow greater access to emerging ethnic populations having a preference for goat meat <<http://south.osu.edu/cle/>>.

Building Leadership Capacity

Leadership development has been a primary objective of the Ohio Meat Goat Task Force. Producer members have been instrumental in the formation of the Buckeye Meat Goat Association. This group has developed by-laws and articles of incorporation for the purpose of promoting and marketing commercial meat goat producers in Ohio.

Three producer-driven marketing networks have been established to initiate the infrastructure and marketing of fresh chevon. Task force members have lead roles in on-farm research and demonstrations. Producers have been instrumental in securing grant funds and teaching at field days. The task force has enhanced their effectiveness by partnering with agencies such as the Ohio Cooperative Development Center, Ohio Tobacco Foundation, Heifer International, Somalia and East African Organization, Jewish Family Services, and Institute for Social And Economic Development.

This task force is taking a unique approach to building infrastructure of the meat goat industry by using a social approach to market development within emerging ethnic and faith based consumers. This foundation infrastructure will create value-added opportunities for refugees in our urban centers and small farms in Ohio. Additionally, economic development in the creation of agricultural jobs will do much for community development in the rural/urban interface.

Developing an Industry

The task force has successfully pursued and received \$63,000 in research and Extension grants. This funding is being used to conduct ongoing feasibility studies of ethnic markets, Ohio's processing infrastructure, and development of farmer/consumer cooperatives. A statewide survey revealed a 10-fold increase in the adoption of meat goats as a value-added income-generating enterprise and provided baseline data on production demographics and marketing strategies. On-farm meat goat research encompasses breed comparisons, forage utilization, and developing benchmark data. Research and data analysis is accomplished through partnerships with multiple colleges and universities.

Progress continues in the ability to market a fresh and safe product directly to emerging ethnic and faith-based consumer populations to capture the most value. Behavioral changes include an increase in farmers producing for emerging markets, an increase in communication abilities between producers and markets, and coordination for consumers, retailers, and producers through functional marketing partnerships that fit the social and ecological paradigm.

There is a real opportunity for farmers to network through co-ops or other ventures to build the meat goat industry. As with any commodity, capturing niche markets can add value. Producers on the Ohio Meat Goat Task Force can serve as examples for other developing enterprises. As the saying goes "If you build it; they will come." Meat goats just may be a "Field of Dreams" for animal agriculture.

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