

## 4-H Market Goat Project Budgeting

Every year more and more 4-H members are discovering that goats are an excellent choice as a club project. Because goats are small, easy to work with and demand a small amount of space, they provide a meaningful livestock experience in a relatively short amount of time.

With increasing feed and animal purchase prices it is important to develop a project budget. As your agent, I feel it is important that you have a plan in place rather than jumping in blindly. I am responsible for growing livestock project participation but I can't in good conscience encourage you to sacrifice family finances that might be needed elsewhere. If money is tight there are other animal projects we can look at that can be just as rewarding and educational.

Lets begin formulating a budget:

Before you purchase any livestock project you need to evaluate your facilities. Do you have adequate pen space and shelter from the elements for your animal. Your pen should be as large as possible so they can get plenty of exercise, but at least 40 square feet per animal . The shelter requirements are about 16 square feet per animal and should be three sided with the opening facing south or east. Do you have good water source? Everything in life isn't about convenience but it has been my experience that animals seem to do better when you have good facilities that encourage good care. Lets assume you have nothing but a place to put up a pen.

4x8 three sided plywood shelter: \$150 (if you build it yourself)

4- wire panels at least 48" high: \$100

16- 6' T-Posts: \$80

Water and Feeders: \$30

So, we are at a minimum of \$360 and you have not bought a goat or a bag of feed.

Depending on your project goals a decent market wether or doe is going to cost **at least** \$300.00. If you have friends or relatives that are in the business and are willing to sell you a good goat at a drastically reduced price, do not hesitate to take them up on the offer. For the rest of us let's just stick with the original number. With the cost of the facilities plus the purchase price of the animal we now have **\$660.00** invested. Now let's see what its going to cost to feed and care for the animal for the duration of the project.

Again, this will depend on your own goals but your feed expenses will correlate to the length of time you own the animal. If you intend to show a heavyweight wether or doe at the county show or a major market show, your feeding period will be considerably longer because you will probably buy them earlier to ensure you have a good selection to choose from. Conversely, if you want to show in the lightweight division of your particular show your feeding period will be significantly shorter (by as much

as two months), resulting in a lower overall feed expense. For the sake of simplicity let's assume you buy your april born goat in July and it weighs 40 lbs. Our target weight for a January show is 90 lbs. This means we need to add 50 lbs between July and January. Goats are generally poor converters of feed and require 7.5 lbs of a ration to add 1 lb. of weight. Simply multiply 50 lbs by 7.5 and that will give you the amount of feed required to get your animal to its target weight. This will vary depending on weather conditions and the goats health condition. In cold weather you might have to increase feeding amounts by 20% to maintain optimum growing conditions. Keep in mind that goats will generally only consume about 2 lbs of feed per day. Goats are ruminants and will require some hay (fiber) to keep their digestive system functioning properly. Some feeders offer freechoice alfalfa but it is probably better to limit feed them an amount that complements your particular ration rather than working against your feeding program. Lets assume 2lbs of good quality coastal hay per day.

Now lets put our numbers together.

### **Ration**

50 lbs added weight needed X 7.5 (conversion rate) = 375 lbs of a good show goat ration

375 /50 lbs= 7.5 bags of feed (lets make it 8 bags)

8 bags @ 15.00 = \$120 (this number will vary depending on the brand of feed you choose)

### **Hay**

2lbs/day X 180 days = 360

360 lbs/ 60 lb bale = 6 bales

6 bales X 10.00/bale = \$60

**Total Feed cost (ration + Hay) = \$180**

Now our running total is **\$840.00**

But wait, there's more.....We have not discussed Health issues, show equipment, entry fees, validation tags, travel, etc...

### **Health**

Hopefully you will have some good luck and not encounter any serious health issues so we will not put a figure in this category other than your monthly internal parasite control which will cost you about \$30 for the season. Just be prepared for those unforeseen instances that may warrant a trip to the vet.

### **Equipment**

Stiff Brush (for cleaning water trough) \$5.00

Shovel and rake to clean pens \$40  
Scales to periodically weigh your goat \$ 1200 (used)  
Trimming table \$300 (Sullivan's Supply)  
Electric Clippers \$300 (Sullivan's Supply)  
Small animal clippers \$200 (for ears, face, and fine work)  
Blanket \$20.00  
Halter \$10  
Collar \$15.00  
Muzzle \$15.00  
Hoof Trimmers \$20.00  
Drench Gun \$20.00  
Soft grooming brush \$10.00  
Blower \$400.00  
Extension Cord \$20.00

This is a fairly extensive list and some things you may already have and will not have to be included in your startup budget. There are other items such as the portable scales, clippers, and blowers that you may be able to borrow. These items are also available from the County Extension Office.

One of the most overlooked expenses is travel. For a major show in Texas, plan on 3-5 nights in a hotel (\$300-\$1000), food (\$250-\$500), fuel (\$120-\$360). Entry fees, grounds passes, and parking passes will add another \$100 per show. Most families who attend major shows consider them a vacation and budget accordingly.

In Conclusion, it appears that a good solid number for beginning your goat project looks to be in the ballpark of **\$480** if you have everything except the goat and feed and **\$1250** assuming you have no existing facilities or equipment. If you go all the way and buy everything you need the first year you will have invested a whopping **\$3400** or more depending on your facilities.

Now let me talk you back down off the ledge. My intent is not to discourage you from participating- its quite the opposite. I just want you to see the big picture of what it costs to be involved in a livestock project. You have options. Other than the goat purchase price and feed expenses, the other items can be cheapened up quite a bit. Chances are, if you are interested in showing goats its because you have friends or family that have had a good experience with it and have encouraged you to consider participating as well. If that is the case they are probably more than willing to help you get started with some equipment. Maybe they have extra room at their facility so you don't have to build your own the

first year. I have one caveat, housing your animals at a friend or relatives place does not exempt you from the daily care of the animal. The main object of a livestock project is to teach young people the importance of being responsible. They will carry whatever we teach them into adulthood. They may choose not to be as adults but its our job to see they have it when they get there. Having someone else care for your animal is counterproductive to the whole process. (rant over) Also, look for bargains on used equipment. Every Spring there are many graduating seniors or folks that decided that livestock projects were not for them offer their equipment for sale. Word of mouth, Craigslist, Ebay, and other websites are great places to look for equipment. You just have to keep your eyes open. As you gain knowledge and experience in the project you will develop a program that suits your families particular needs. You will begin to see better feeding programs, better facilities and equipment, genetically superior animals, and showmanship techniques that will steer your goals. My best advice is not new but I think it is the best:

**Start small, gain some knowledge and experience, learn from your mistakes as well as others, and always have a plan or goal in front of you.**

In my next blog we will look at Selection Criteria so stay tuned.....

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