

Michigan

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Artisan cheese finds a foothold in Michigan
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American Farm Bureau honors 2 couples
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Grow goats

By JENNIFER VINCENT

Key Points

- Ethnic populations are creating more demand for goat meat.
- U.S. is a net importer of goat meat.
- Lean goat meat is attracting health-conscious consumers.

IT'S highly unlikely that you'll find goat meat for sale at Kroger next week or next month. But looking to the future, it's a growing possibility as Michigan's ethnic population continues to rise, pushing demand well beyond in-state supply.

That's a great scenario for anyone wanting to serve a niche market — even those with small acreage.

Detroit, with the largest Muslim community in the U.S., is driving demand, but there is also an expanding Hispanic market that prefers goat meat, along with health-conscious consumers looking for fresh, lean cuts of homegrown meat.

While goat meat is not a mainstay in most of the U.S., goat is the most frequently consumed meat in the world. With ethnic populations growing, as well as their income levels, the U.S. shifted from a net exporter of goat meat to a net importer

in 1991. Even though goat production ramped up about 4% from 2007 to 2008, according to the USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service, the supply of goat meat can't meet demand.

Heather and Glenn Schroeder of Laingsburg have about 70 to 80 goats on their 10-acre farm. "We have a steady market and attract customers from Monroe to Traverse City," Heather says about selling for both slaughter and 4-H projects. "There are many times when I have to turn people away because I don't have a goat available."

The Schroeders, who both work full time off the farm, call themselves hobby farmers.

"There is definitely a demand for goat meat in Michigan," ex-



GET YOUR GOAT: Glenn and Heather Schroeder of Laingsburg started off with just two goats and now have more than 70 at a time. They are small-scale, niche farmers who are making a profit in selling meat goats for 4-H projects and individual slaughter.

plains Bill Knudson, a marketing economist with the Michigan State University Product Center. "But, it's important to note that it is a niche market and not a mass market."

Knudson and Terri Fryman, who founded the Michigan Boer Goat Association, could not cite

a commercial goat operation in the state. "It's small-scale production," Fryman says. "There is an opportunity, as more people get involved with meat goat production, to form a cooperative for larger-scale marketing."

Fryman says the meat goat industry is a good venue for

small-scale farmers. "There have been some of us that have done very well, while others have gotten out after just a few years. You have to clearly define your market and grow at a reasonable and profitable level."

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