NEW YORK STATE 4-H DAIRY GOAT PROJECT
FACT SHEET #1

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WHY DO I WANT TO OWN A GOAT?

Have you asked yourself this question? Do you think that baby goats are cute and might be sort of fun to own? Have you really thought hard about the responsibility of owning and caring for a goat? Well, give it some thought now **before** you rush out to buy a goat.

There are several types of 4 -H goat projects. However, regardless of which project you choose, you can count on having to feed and water and check in on your goat at least twice each day. Yes, that's right! In the middle of winter you will probably have to get up while it is still dark to take care of your goat before going off to school . After school you'll need to count on doing your goat chores again as well as homework, any sports and social activities you like to do, and any other household chores you are responsible for. You'll also need to clean your goat's pen and shelter periodically and learn to trim your goat's feet. Do you have the time and energy for a goat? It's a good idea to talk to your family now about how you will arrange your time to care for a goat.

Another thing to check on before buying your goat is whether there are any local laws against having a goat on your property. If you cannot have a goat where you live, you may be able to lease a goat from a goat producer and help care for it on their place. However, check first with your county extension office to find out under what conditions leasing is allowed by 4 - H. You may also keep your goat on a friend's farm, but if so make sure that both your families get along well and understand what your duties are and what punishments or actions are to be taken if you do not take care of your goat. Even if there are no local laws against keeping a goat on your land, plan on putting your goat pen where it will not bother your neighbors. Goats can be very vocal at times and may attract flies in the summer, especially if you forget to clean their pen regularly. If you decide to get a goat , be sure to have housing, fencing and everything else you will need ready before the goat comes home with you. You can hardly keep your goat in your bedroom while you build its shelter.

If you and your family are sure that you have the time, energy, and place to care for a goat, the next question to ask yourself is what kind of a goat project do I want to do? Here's a list of goat projects:

1) Dairy goat project - dairy goats are much smaller than cows, cost much less to house and feed, and give family-sized amounts of milk daily. They bond well with the person who milks and feeds them, live about as long as a dog and make great companions. However, you do need to milk them twice a day. If your family consumes a lot of milk and dairy products, dairy goats may be the perfect animals for you. It is easy to make delicious cheeses from goats' milk. Goat milk has a slightly different composition than cow milk, so a family member who is allergic to cow milk can usually drink goat milk. It's a good idea to have your family try some goat dairy products and see how they like them before you buy a dairy goat. Of course, to produce milk a dairy goat must first produce kids. This means you need a shelter suitable for overwintering a goat and kidding in. You must also learn how to dispose of extra kids unless you want to own a whole herd. Actually, one goat alone tends to be a very lonely, unhappy, noisy animal, so most people prefer to own at least two goats.

2) Recreational goat project - castrated male goats (called wethers) can be raised with lots of human contact and trained to either carry packs or pull carts. You do not need to milk them, however they require daily exercise just like a dog although you can usually slack off in the winter months. A goat needs to be about two years old before he is strong enough to carry a full pack or pull a cart. However, basic training starts at about 2 to 3 months of age. By one year of age a wether can easily carry a soft pack with your lunch, spare jacket, and water in it and accompany you hiking. It usually takes two people to train a driving wether so make sure you have a friend

or family member who is willing to commit to helping you out. You should also plan on having to spend money buying packing and driving equipment. Be sure to check out the price of necessary equipment in various catalogs before you buy your wether. There are plans available for making your own soft packs and driving carts. Harnesses used to train goats or to pull sleds or stone boats along the ground are relatively inexpensive. However, the harnesses used in 4 -H competitions to pull carts and the rigid packs for serious packing are much more expensive. A wether can live for a long time so you need to make sure you will not eventually tire of him.

3) Meat goat breeding doe project - female goats (does) can be used to raise meat goat kids rather than for producing milk for your family. Just like a dairy goat they require suitable housing for overwintering and kidding. They do not need daily milking. However, you must find a market for their slaughter kids every year. Meat goat does are often grazed on pastures from May through November.

4) Meat goat market wether project - market wether projects are short term projects, unlike the other goat projects. Castrated male goat kids are purchased in the spring when they are old enough to be separated from their mothers (weaned). This occurs when they are about 10 to 12 weeks old. You can also raise a kid from birth from your own meat goat breeding doe. Either way, the goal is to do a good job of raising them through the summer until they are ready to slaughter and weigh anywhere from about 50 to 90 pounds. Because you will not be keeping the goat over the winter, the housing requirements of a market wether are simpler than those of the other goat projects. Before you get a meat goat kid, you need to make sure that you are willing to have it killed for meat even though it will become very tame over the summer. You will also need to find a buyer for the meat unless your family eats goat meat. If you are squeamish about eating your own goat you may be able to exchange the goat meat from your goat with another 4 -Her who also prefers not to eat their own goat. Goat meat is very tasty and is a healthy choice for people who want to eat a red meat that is very low in fat. Be sure to check with your county about what age, weight, and vaccination rules they have for market wether projects and to find out if market wethers must have their horns removed.

5) Fiber goat project - Some goats produce special fibers or wools in their coats that can be spun to make yarn for knitting and crocheting clothing. Angora goats produce curly long wool called mohair. All goats produce a fuzzy undercoat of soft wool in the winter to help keep them warm. This wool is called cashmere. Some goats produce so much cashmere that it is worth the time and effort to comb or shear it off them at the end of winter. You can use a female or castrated male goat for a fiber goat project. However, you must keep their fleeces clean all winter and harvest their fleeces every year. A fiber goat project is perfect for someone who likes goats, wants to learn how to spin, and likes to knit or crochet.

It is important to make sure there is a 4 - H group and leader in your county willing to take on your project before you go out and buy an animal. For example, if there is a dairy goat project in your county, check with them before you buy a meat goat market wether to make sure they will take on your project.

Now that you've thought more about why you would like to own a goat, here are some activities to help you decide if a goat is really for you.

<u>Suggested Activities</u>

1) Find out what local laws might affect your decision to own a goat.

2) Volunteer to help a friend who owns a goat or a goat producer with their goat chores one morning or evening (even Cloverbuds can do this one, especially if accompanied by a responsible adult!).

3) Make a chart of your daily schedule and add to it a list of your anticipated goat chores and the times at which you would do them.

4) Sample various goat products with your family and decide which ones you like best. Goat cheeses can be found in most large supermarkets or purchased direct from local goat dairies, while goat meat is available through butcher shops, specialty meat stores, and from individual producers. Contact the Empire State Meat Goat Producers' Association for further direction if you have trouble locating goat meat.

5) Locate an owner of a pack or driving goat and ask them if you can tag along while they work their goat.