Some Tips To Make Goat Raising Easier

Home

Herd Sires

For Sale

Performance Test Results

Inventory

Dogs

Ranch Scenery

Maps

Articles/Columns

Webrings/Links

Contact Us

This page updated 02/13/04

I will address equipment and facilities for goats in the next two columns. I have included lots of pictures to illustrate what I'm writing about.

Most of the equipment and facilities pictured are from my ranch in West Central Texas. Depending on your location and the local climate, you may need different or additional equipment and facilities to accommodate your needs.

Transportation

If you are raising goats you will eventually have a need to move them further than you care to herd them. For large quantities of goats a trailer will be necessary, however, smaller numbers can easily be transported in the bed of a pickup.

To prevent the goats from jumping out you can use either a goat tote or a topper. A goat tote is basically a cage made with a galvanized pipe frame and 4" welded wire mesh top and sides.

During cold and/or wet weather the goat tote can be covered with canvas or nylon to keep the wind and rain out.

Goat totes are suitable for carrying a couple of goats, and will allow you to use a portion of the bed for other items since the totes are typically smaller than the bed of a pickup.

The other option is to use a topper. A topper is a fiberglass or aluminum shell that covers the bed of the pickup. They typically have windows that can be opened or closed to regulate the air flow and keep rain out.

If you are going to open the windows, you may want to install 4" welded wire mesh over them like I have done in mine to prevent the goats from jumping out.

To install the wire mesh, I first cut it to size using bolt cutters, and then attached it by screwing cable clips to the window frame. Cable clips are J shaped clips that have a hole for a bolt or screw on the flat end, and the curved end is designed to hold a coax cable. You can compress the curved end slightly so it snugly grabs the slightly smaller wire mesh with pliers.

You can haul more goats if you use a topper since you will have the use of the entire bed. The bed in my 1989 GMC S-15 pickup is approximately 7.5' by 4.5', and I have transported as many as 25 small (60 lb) or 15 mature goats at a time in there. I wouldn't recommend packing them that tightly on a long trip, but for a 15 minute trip it works ok. For long trips you can comfortably accommodate about 17 small goats or 10 mature ones in a bed that size.

Feeders

Unless you live in an area where adequate forage is available year round and you are not overstocked, you will need to feed your goats during a portion of each year. You may also need to provide a mineral supplement to them.

Good feeders are a necessity to maximize the utilization of the feed and mineral you provide. A good feeder should keep the feed clean and dry until the goats eat it. This requires that the feeder be placed in a building or that it come equipped with a cover.

The biggest source of feed contamination is the goats themselves. A good feeder is designed in a way that prevents the goats from climbing in it or pawing the food out of it.

The bunk feeders I use in my shelters have been modified for use with goats. I started with a bunk that has a lip around the top that makes it nearly impossible for a goat to paw the feed out of it. This feature is not found on all feeders, but trust me you will be sorry if you buy a bunk feeder that does not have it.

Most bunk feeders available in my area are designed for use with cattle and are too tall for young goats. If you look closely at the photo you will see that I have buried the legs of the feeder in the ground to lower its height making it easier for small goats to eat out of it.

Goats love nothing more than to lay in a bunk feeder, and the U shaped bottom of a standard bunk feeder makes a comfortable bed for them. If you allow them to sleep in the feeder, they will stand up from their nap and urinate and defecate all over the feed in the bunk. Once that happens the goats will not eat the feed, and you will have to clean up the mess and give them more feed before they will eat.

I have made a couple of modifications to our feeders to prevent this. First, I installed hay racks on shortened supports. The standard height supports are too tall and allow a mature goat to lay underneath them in the feeder.

Be careful not to shorten the supports too much. If you shorten the supports too much bucks will not be able to get their heads in the feeders, and will "modify" them for you by knocking out or bending the V's that form the hay rack.

Even if the supports are the proper height bucks seem to enjoy tearing the feeders up, so we have a support running across the middle of the V's instead of just attaching them at the top and bottom as is standard with most hay racks I've seen. This greatly strengthens the hay rack and makes damage less likely.

Another modification I have planned but have not completed yet, is to add rods spaced every other V that run from close to the bottom of the V's to the lip of the feeder to prevent dominant does from shoving the other does' heads out of the feeder.

The second modification I made was to have an inverted V shaped piece of galvanized tin fabricated. I then bolted it to the bottom of the bunk. This prevents all but the smallest kids from laying in the feeder, and directs the feed away from the middle of the feeder, so it is easier for the goats to reach it.

During the summer it normally becomes necessary for me to provide feed for the doelings. Since they are in the same pasture as the does I have built a creep pen to house their feeder. In the photo below my 2 year old son Sam demonstrates how the goats exit the feeder.

The sides of the creep pen are 10' long "sheep panels." They are 42" tall, and are made from galvanized tube and 4" welded wire mesh. They are wired together at the sides to form a square, and are also secured to posts driven in the ground.

Over the center of the pen I have fabricated a 6'x10' partial roof using a cee purlin frame covered by galvanized steel R panels. The cee purlins fit perfectly over the top of the side panels preventing the roof from sliding off, and I use wire to keep a strong wind from lifting it off.

When in use I place two 8' long bunk feeders about 18" inside of the edge of the roof, one on each side, which allows me to easily fill them while protecting them from rain.

To give the small goats access I have cut holes in the wire mesh with bolt cutters. The bottom of the openings is about 10" off the ground. Very young kids can utilize 8"x8" openings (2 squares by 2 squares), but as they grow a larger opening is required.

Unfortunately, making the opening 12" (3 squares) tall by 8" (2 squares) wide will allow even small yearling does to access the feed. If you look closely on the side Sam is not going through you can see how I have remedied the problem.

By adding a wire from the top of the second square on one side stretching to the middle of the top of the opening, and then back down to the top of the second square on the other side you can form a house shaped opening that will allow older doelings access while keeping out yearlings and older goats.

As you can see in the picture those wires frequently get broken, so they will need periodic replacement, or you could weld rods in place. I intend to use welded rods this year which explains why I haven't replaced the broken wires.

This same setup works well for a dog feeder for your livestock guard dogs, but instead of cutting holes in the wire mesh you would want to dig a slide under one side just deep and wide enough for a dog to slide under the panel on its side, but too shallow for a goat to slide under on its belly (goats won't slide on their sides). You also need to be sure to secure the panels to the ground so the goats can't lift them up as they attempt to crawl under.

You also need to make sure the feeder is in a well drained location so the slide won't fill with water, and you may want to line it with rocks, sand, cement, etc. to prevent the bottom from turning to mud when it rains.

Finally, many areas of the country are deficient in at least one mineral or another, so mineral supplements are frequently required.

I like a mineral feeder like the one in the photo that has a cover that rotates as the wind changes directions to block rain from getting in the feeder. I use a loose mineral, and if it gets wet it turns hard like cement when it dries.

Having the mineral up off the ground seems to reduce the amount of waste from goats pawing the mineral out of the feeder, and/or introducing dirt and fecal matter from their hooves.

Water Troughs

All goats need a source of clean water. If you don't have a lake or other body of water that is available year round, then you will need some sort of water trough.

I use 55 gallon black plastic troughs with float valves to keep them full. Our water lines run underground to prevent them from freezing, and the spigots are located inside irrigation boxes to protect them from the goats and cold temperatures.

I use braided stainless steel washing machine hoses with a female to female adapter to supply the float valve from the spigot. These hoses are very tough, and I have not had one ruined by a goat or dog chewing on it yet. I have been using this type of hose to feed the troughs for about 6 years now.

During periods that temperatures will remain below freezing for more than a day it is necessary to use electric tank deicers. Of course, these work better if they are plugged in. To accommodate this requirement I have positioned all the water troughs next to either a fence or building, and run electricity to those locations.

In the case of water troughs that are located away from buildings, I have run the electric lines in gray PVC conduit down the fence, and mounted the outlets in waterproof boxes attached to the fence behind the hot wire so the goats can't play with them. The boxes have a clear clamshell type cover that allows the cover to be closed even when a deicer is plugged in.

Water troughs that are located next to buildings also have electrical outlets nearby. In that case I have mounted the outlets about 4' off the ground above the water trough (in the photo below my 5 year old son MJ is holding open the outlet cover) so the goats can't play with them. Those boxes have a white clamshell type cover that matches the building and allows the cover to be closed even when a deicer is plugged in.

Using large troughs has its advantages and disadvantages. The primary advantage is that if the pump goes out, a water line breaks, or you experience some other type of service interruption you have extra water available for the goats until repairs can be made.

The main disadvantage is that the larger troughs are irresistible swimming holes for the guard dogs in warm weather, and will need to be frequently cleaned. I solved this problem by cutting a piece of 4" welded wire mesh to the exact size and shape of the top of the troughs.

Just below the waterline in the trough is a lip that the welded wire mesh can rest on. Having it in there in no way interferes with the animals drinking since it is a couple of inches below the waterline

when the trough is full, but the dogs sure don't seem to like swimming with it in there. If you lose your water supply be sure to remove it so the animals can reach all the water, though.

Algae growth and mosquitos can also be a problem in water troughs. I have used both chlorine bleach and copper products (the type they use to control algae growth in lakes) to prevent this problem. If you use these products make sure they are safe for human or animal consumption, and be careful not to add so much that you harm your goats. The copper products can also be helpful if you are in a copper deficient area.

Fences

If you can make the place water-tight you should be able to keep your goats in. Actually, I haven't found it that difficult to keep goats in under typical commercial conditions. If you are not overstocked/overcrowded goats are usually pretty respectful of a fence. You run into problems when the stuff on the other side of the fence looks better to eat than what you have on your side of the fence.

The bigger problem is keeping them from getting stuck in the fence so you don't have to spend your entire life removing goats from the fence. I have found a hot wire run about a foot to 18 inches off the ground 8-12 inches inside the fence to be effective in keeping the goats from sticking their head through the fence or rubbing on the fence.

For fence sections that will separate rutting bucks from each other or from does in heat I use two hot wires. One a foot to 18 inches off the ground, and the other about a foot above the first on both sides of the fence (see photo of the electrical outlet mounted on the fence above). This prevents the bucks from damaging the fence in those areas.

I use wire standoffs with pinlock insulators on the ends that twist into the fence to accomplish this. They are manufactured by PEL (part #PI-63) and Twin Mountain Fence (800-527-0990) distributes them. These may be installed on net wire/field fence, barbed wire or high tensile wire.

Many properties are already fenced with 4 or 5 strands of barbed wire. By using the existing barbed wires as ground wires and adding steel high tensile wires connected to a charger between them mounted to the posts with insulators, you can quickly and economically make this type of fence functional for goats. Do not use the aluminum wire as it tends to stretch and sag and is easily broken.

Alternatively, you can use net wire or field fence with the hot wire on a standoff I discussed above. Make sure you get the 1047-6-12.5 or 1047-12-12.5 fence. That type of fence has horizontal stays that are a couple of inches apart at the bottom and about six inches apart at the top. That will prevent your kids from wandering off and/or predators from crawling in through the fence. The types that have eight inch by eight inch holes will allow goats and predators of considerable size to get through. As I mentioned above, I use that size of an opening in my creep gates for the kids, and weaning size kids can make it through them.

The middle number in the model number describes the spacing of the vertical stays, either six inch or 12 inch. Some people recommend the 12 inch stays on the theory that the goats can get their heads out of it instead of getting stuck. In my experience the goats will get stuck in both, you just need to choose which size goat you want to catch. The six inch vertical stays are too close together for the mature does to get their horns through, so they don't get stuck in it. The kids and yearlings have no difficulty whatsoever putting their heads all the way through the openings and will get stuck almost every time.

Go with the 12 inch vertical stays and the kids and yearlings can get their heads out, but the older does will get stuck. The 12 inch stays also allow predators of considerable size to go right through the fence. My perimeter fence has the 12 inch stays and I have witnessed my neighbor's Labs go right through it like it wasn't there. Fortunately, my LGD's kept them from hurting my goats, and my neighbor is doing a better job of keeping them on his property. If I had to do it over again I would use the six inch stays with a hot wire like I have around my pens and along the river.

The final number represents the gauge of wire used. It comes in 12.5 gauge and 14 gauge wire. The top and bottom strand are heavier

gauge in both models. I recommend you use the 12.5 gauge wire. The 14 gauge wire is not heavy enough to restrain goats. I have witnessed them putting their head through the openings in the 14 gauge fence, and then pushing until the wires broke or stretched enough to let them through. This is less of a problem if you also use a hotwire, but a goat or deer may still run into the fence while being chased and go through. That doesn't seem to be a problem with the heavier wire.

Next month I will discuss and give tips for shelters and storage buildings.