

New Profits Possible From Fainting And Cashmere Goats

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— When it comes to animals, Dawn Jermigan likes the unusual. On her 13-acre Sellersville farm, she raises both Fainting and Cashmere goats.

"Fainting goats are small, wonderful, gentle, and have a mild temperament," Jermigan said.

The Fainting goats are pigmy size, come in all colors, and breed year around, but the most unusual thing about the rare breed is that they actually faint when frightened.

This happens from a genetically myatonia condition that causes the goats' muscles to become very hard and stiff when frightened. Generally, they stiffen up in the rear legs and are unable to walk for a few seconds, but if badly frightened, the whole body stiffens and they fall over and are unable to get up for a few seconds.

The breed, which originated in Tennessee during the 1880s, became almost extinct. One of the reasons for their declining numbers resulted from farmers who place the Fainting goats with their sheep flocks. When coyote attack, the goats faint and the predators attack them instead of the lambs.

About five years ago the Tennessee Fainting Goat Association began promoting and registering the breed. The numbers have increased rapidly and about 600 are now registered. But the most important thing is that people are recognizing the breed for their gentle qualities as pets and they now carry a \$300 price tag.

"People usually buy them in pairs," Jermigan said. "Otherwise, the goats cry. They do not make good solitary animals."

Jermigan had begun raising dairy goats about 15 years ago. "It was when homesteading was popular and I wanted to live off the land," she said.

But she soon discovered that required too much work so, by day, she works as an executive secretary, and in off hours, she concentrates on raising good looking animals that she displays on the show circuit.

"I can raise five Fainting goats

on what it costs to raise a dairy goat," she said.

Currently, Jermigan has 10 does and 4 bucks of the Fainting goats.

In addition to raising them for breeding animals and for pets, she is crossbreeding them to raise cashmere.

Cashmere goats

Recently Jermigan imported a black Cashmere buck from Australia and some crossbred does. In June, she will be getting some white Cashmere does from Australia.

According to Jermigan, U.S. cashmere processors had been importing cashmere from other countries. The industry could not find enough cashmere to meet the demand. In some cases the government gave grants to Cashmere breeders to test the feasibility of having a U.S. cashmere industry.

Jermigan believes that cross breeding Cashmere and Fainting goats produces at high quality cashmere. Goats are graded for the cashmere they produce on a scale that ranges from 15 to 18 microns, with 15 being the finer cashmères.

"My goal is to breed quality animals with a fine micron count and good yields," Jermigan said. "To do this I will use my buck, Moonlighter, who has a fine micron count of 15.13, as well as using artificial insemination with semen from some of the best Australian bucks."

Although Cashmere goats can be crossed with various breeds, Jermigan cautions that mixing and Angora and Cashmere breeds makes the fleece worthless.

Once a year, usually in the spring, Jermigan collects the cashmere hair by combing or by shearing. The fine cashmere is protected by guard hairs, and if sheered the cashmere fleece must be dehaired.

Cashmere processor

Forte, a luxury wool processing company, guarantees to purchase all cashmere produced in this country during 1990. They pay \$45 per pound for cashmere with a micron count under 16. Cashmere with a micron count of 16 to 19 receives a \$35 payment.

Hugh Hopkins, Forte general



The Fainting goat breed has gained popularity among pet lovers who find that the small, sweet-tempered goats make excellent pets.

manager, said it is important that producers realize these prices are for cashmere only. Fleece that is sent in is dehaired. If someone sends a two pound fleece, it may weigh only one pound after it is dehaired. Hopkins said, they will reimburse farmers for any amount of cashmere even one handful and there is no charge for those who want them to critique a fleece.

Primarily, the world's cashmere is produced 50 percent by the People's Republic of China, 25 percent by Outer Mongolia, and 25 percent by Iran and Afghanistan with fringe amounts produced in Australia and New Zealand.

Four years ago, Forte, a 62-year-old company that began in Boston, looked at U.S. goats particularly in Texas and found that the wild Spanish meat goat was producing significant quantities of cashmere.

In an effort to develop U.S. markets, Forte purchased some Spanish goat fleeces to extract the cashmere.

In an effort to improve the cashmere, a few people imported Australian goats and crossbred them with other breeds.

Last year, Forte looked at 850 fleeces. They rejected 130 fleeces and ended up with 65 pounds of cashmere.

This year, so far, they have looked at 2,000 fleeces and rejected only 10.

"The people have a better understanding of what we are looking for, and we are finding magnificent, domesticated goats that are producing far better cashmere than that imported," Hopkins said.

At the same time, Hopkins cautions, "Cashmere growers survive only if cashmere is not the predominate source of income. Fortunately, the U.S. has a strong goat meat market and if producers shear the goats before selling to the meat market — that is money in their pockets."

Some farmers combine wool growing with grazing. "Goats are fantastic weed eaters," Hopkins said. "Since herbicides are frowned upon, many are looking to goats to control weeds. In fact, in some western states the government is paying a bounty for people to use goats as weed eaters."

Although Hopkins is not aware

of goats being used for weed control in the East, he is optimistic of research breakthroughs. He said, "Through experimentation, farmers may find goats can control weeds in the East. Research is

the cashmere market, Hopkins said, "Research, learn all you can about the industry. Unfortunately there are too many looking for a quick dollar that want to get in and get out of the market quickly. It



Dawn Jermigan holds one of her Fainting Goats.

changing the industry."

For those considering raising cashmere goats, Hopkins encourages them to join Cashmere Producers of America, P.O. Box 443, Longmont, Col. 80502.

Of those interested in entering

won't happen that way."

Forte offers to send farmers an informational packet for potential producers to examine. Send to Forte, P.O. Box 869, Woomsocket, R.I. 02895, or call (401) 762-2000 or fax 401 769-9645.



Moonlighter, a black Cashmere buck, will be used for breeding stock and to produce cashmere wool.



Although this goat appears dead, it has only fainted for a few minutes.