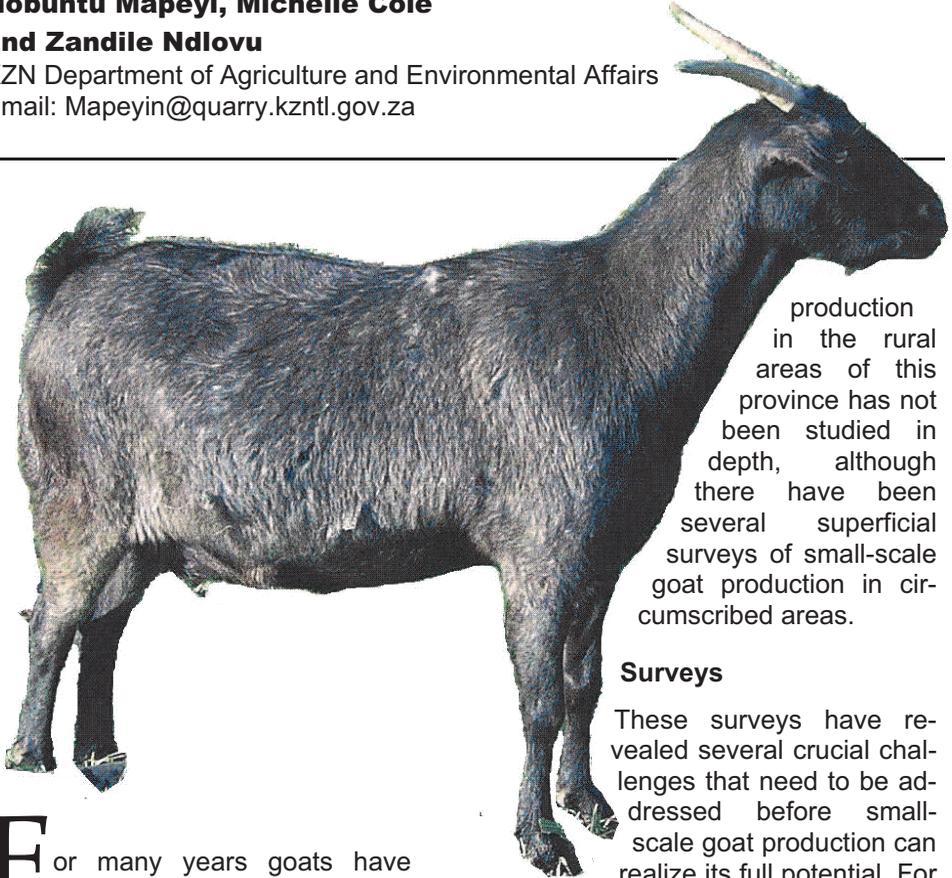


The Goat Study Group in KwaZulu-Natal

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production in the rural areas of this province has not been studied in depth, although there have been several superficial surveys of small-scale goat production in circumscribed areas.

Surveys

These surveys have revealed several crucial challenges that need to be addressed before small-scale goat production can realize its full potential. For example, both established and new-entrant farmers must be able to access quality breeding stock and the lack of organised goat sales makes it difficult for the goat producers to sell young stock. These aspects have been compounded by the

For many years goats have figured prominently in the livestock-holding patterns of small-scale farmers in KwaZulu-Natal, but the importance of this role has not been fully recognized or supported by research and extension. In particular, small-scale indigenous goat

commercialisation of large-scale goat production which led to increased demand and elevated prices. Unfortunately for local producers, the increased demand was met, largely, from out of province or by imports from Namibia.

While there is a breed society for Boer goats which can support the large-scale producers of this breed, there is no breed society that can support or assist the small-scale producer farming with indigenous goats.

It was also found that the majority of small-scale goat producers lack business skills and generally do not appreciate the full value of their goats, either in their culture or as a possible source of income.

One of the very important results of these surveys was the finding that the staff of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs realized the lack (or the inadequacy) of goat production information. Major lacunae were identified in respect of the economics of goat production particularly in respect of business planning; preventative herd health management for goats especially the control of internal parasites; and goat nutrition.

Studies in human nutrition have indicated that a large portion of the Black population is unable to digest cows' milk and this suggests that there could be a sustained demand for goats' milk and goats' milk products. While interest in milch goat production was constant, it ap-

peared that meat production was the most important focus area.

Study trips

The present wave of interest in goat production was sparked by a couple of talks on milk goats that were broadcast on the eight rural radio stations that participate in the Department's radio initiative. This surging interest led to study trips being organised and to the formation of partnerships within the goat industry. Within KwaZulu-Natal a trip was undertaken August 2005 to identify milk goat breeding stock. This was followed by five farmers and six officials from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs travelling to Limpopo in early December 2005 where they saw Indigenous, Boer and Kalahari Red goats produced for meat, as well as Saanen milch goats.

After the visit to Limpopo, a feedback workshop was held and this, in turn, led to the formation of the KwaZulu-Natal Goat Study Group in February 2006 to support and mobilise goat farmers and owners and to organise events in their best interests. The activities of the Group are run by a small Steering Committee.

Information days

The first activity was the Goat Information Day held in May 2006 at Cedara. The day was an overwhelming success, with over 700



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people attending including goat owners; goat farmers; prospective goat farmers; departmental staff interested in goats; representatives of other departments and agribusinesses and NGOs.

Experts in a number of fields were invited to talk on almost every aspect of goat production. Talks were given on nutrition and health management; browsing and bush encroachment control; kid rearing and fostering; branding and security; and marketing. Several goat farmers, both small-scale and commercial, shared their experiences with the audience.

Goat producers in the southern parts of KZN considered this day so informative that it was followed by a 2-day Goat Information Workshop in July at Cedara Research station; eighteen people attended including farmers, Departmental staff and NGOs. A second workshop was held in August 2006 at the Dundee

Research Station to cater for goat producers in the northern areas; approximately 100 small-scale farmers attended. Another Goat Information Day was held at Ndwedwe later and 38 farmers and 10 Technicians attended, as well as representatives from the veterinary sector. A further goat information day was held at Jozini in January and another is scheduled for Eshowe in February during 2007.

Training

General herd health and management of goats was identified as a priority. Since internal parasites were one of the major goat herd health problems identified in the initial surveys, the decision was taken to provide practical training on determining the worm burden and the need for strategic dosing (by using the so-called FAMACHA chart). Such training was organised by Departmental staff and offered

at:

- Pongola - 18 farmers (at present all own goats and want to commercialize their goat production) and 4 Departmental technicians
- Mandeni - 24 farmers and 5 representatives of different co-operatives).
- Cedara Research Station where the 8 Departmental technicians and 1 scientist from Ilembe, Ndwedwe and Maphumulo were trained.
- Cedara College - Commodity Training session for retraining extension officers conducted in conjunction with the College
- Maphumulo - 3 farmers trained at their homesteads
- Mzimkhulu - 30 farmers and 7 Departmental staff.

It was gratifying to note that the farmers responded very well to the concept of strategic dosing and the training in the use of the FAMACHA chart. Ten farmers bought the FAMACHA charts.

Goatkeepers' Veterinary Manual

Under the auspices of the Goat Study Group, more than 500 copies of the Goat Keepers' Veterinary Manual (produced by the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute in conjunction with the Department) were distributed to farmers at information days and during farm visits and in response to telephonic requests. Several of the founder members of

the Goat Study Group were instrumental in the compilation of this manual and although it preceded the development of the Group, it did serve as a powerful catalyst in consolidating enthusiasm for goat production within the Province. This illustrated, easy-to-use manual is produced in full-colour and is available in English and Zulu.

The Goat Study Group formulated a business plan which served, in respect of goat production information, to encourage the two administrative regions (North and South) of the KZN Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs to work closely together since requests that come to Cedara are from the whole province. The business plan, in recognizing the powerful role that radio has played in this project, allows for regular news items on goat-related issues to sustain community interest in small-scale goat production.

The Future

The demand for information on goats has been huge, and has led to exciting directions in future research and extension activities in the Department. Cost-effective solutions to address poor kidding percentages, high mortality (especially in winter), and slow growth rates in communal farming areas need to be explored, and the Department has begun a number of research trials to address some of these issues.