



# Facts & Figures About Canadian Goat Farming

## In General:

- Between 2011 and 2006, the number of goat farms decreased from 2,169 to 2,152, representing a .78% decrease in the number of farms.
- Between 2011 and 2006, the number of goats in Ontario has increased from 76,114 to 116,260. This represents an increase by 52.75%.
- Ontario has 52% of the goats in Canada.
- Ontario has 36% of the goat farms in Canada.
- Ontario has 225 licensed dairy goat farms.
- Chevon (goat's meat) is the most commonly eaten meat world-wide.
- Canadian chevon consumption is higher than chevon production.
- Goat's milk is the most common milk drank worldwide.
- Canadian goat milk consumption is higher than goat milk production.
- Both mohair and cashmere are produced from goats.



## You were asking about...Goats

### Housing: Where Do Goats Live?

Goats have the capacity to adapt to a wide range of environmental conditions. They are a hardy animal that can be kept on marginal land or rough terrain that is unsuitable for other types of livestock.

They are well adapted to the Canadian climate, but they do require shelter for shade in the summer and a dry, draft-free barn in the winter. Goats, like sheep, may be easy prey to predators and they must be kept guarded from harm.

Dairy goats and their offspring are housed and cared for just like dairy cows, with indoor accommodations for the twice-daily milking routine. Commercial dairy goat farms range in size from 150 goats to over 400 goats. Most farmers that are serious about commercial

dairy goat farming are growing their herd to upwards of 400-500 goats, and the largest herd in Ontario has approximately 1,200 goats.

Where production and management permit, loose housing is preferred over tie stalls as goats are naturally very active. At least three square meters of floor space is allotted for each goat where possible.

Goat farmers use the most advanced husbandry practices in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Recommended Code of Practice, developed by farmers, government, animal protection groups, researchers, and processors. Copies may be found at [www.livestockwelfare.com](http://www.livestockwelfare.com).

## Nutrition: What Do Goats Eat?

Goats are herbivores, which means that their diet consists of plant matter. Like sheep and cows they are also known as ruminants: instead of having just one stomach like humans they have four separate stomach compartments that allow specialized digestion of different components of the feed.

The whole digestive process takes a while. A goat will spend several hours a day eating and several hours a day chewing its cud: regurgitating boluses of feed from the rumen (the first stomach compartment), masticating (chewing) them, and re-swallowing them to be further digested in the next three stomach chambers called the reticulum, omasum and abomasum. This lengthy process allows them to efficiently digest low-grade fibre, turning feed grade (lower quality feedstuffs) that would otherwise be unsuitable for human consumption into milk or meat for our tables and fibre for our clothing.

## About the Life Cycle of Goats...

The normal breeding season for goats is from August to March. The gestation period (length of pregnancy) for goats is five months. They are usually bred once a year, meaning that the kids (young goats) will be born between January and August. Does (female goats) may have from one to five kids, but twins are most common. Male goats are known as bucks.

For goats intended for dairy production, the yearling does will be mated at seven to nine months of age so that they can begin to produce milk at about one year of age.

The doe does not usually require help at kidding (birthing) time, but the farmers must ensure that kids nurse or are bottle fed as soon as possible after birth to receive the critical first milk known as colostrum. This milk contains lipids, minerals and vitamins, as well as immunoglobulins (antibodies) that pass along the mother's immunity to disease to her offspring. After two to three days the colostrum will be replaced by milk or milk formula.

Dairy kids are removed from their mothers after birth similar to dairy cows: the kids will be raised on milk replacement formula until they can be weaned at five to seven weeks of age, leaving the doe's milk to be used for human consumption.

Dairy goats are given a 60-day rest from milking before they give birth in order to provide enough nutrition for the developing kid(s) during the final weeks of gestation.

The goat comes from the deer family. Contrary to popular myth, if left to graze naturally they don't eat everything, but rather they are browsers and prefer the leaves off low branches, much like a deer. In a rangeland environment their eating habits allow them to survive even the toughest times of the year, when they can resort to eating woody plants to maintain their protein and energy needs.

Goats, like all farm animals, are catered to with a diet balanced for energy, protein, calcium and other essential nutrients from a mixture of sources including pasture, hay and commercial feeds to support their increased production requirements. Barley, bran and corn are used as energy feeds, peas and soybeans are used as protein supplements and citrus pulp is used to provide calcium to the goat's diet. Additional feed ingredients include alfalfa, grass, clover and sugar beet roots as either pasture or hay. Commercial feeds may include mineral mixes to balance the ration.

Dairy goats are milked twice a day, usually at 12-hour intervals, by machine or by hand. Unlike a cow, goats (and sheep) only have two teats. Goat milk is produced under the same hygienic requirements and conditions as cow's milk.

Kids raised for meat production will nurse from their dam for ten to twelve weeks. The kids will then be weaned from milk to be fed hay, grain and pasture until they reach market weight, which can range between 35 and 90 lb depending on the breed of goat and farm management practices.

Goats naturally have horns with only the occasional goat being polled (naturally hornless). Most farmers remove the horns at an early age (disbudding) for the sake of safety for both people and other animals.





## Goat Dictionary

### Breeds

The goat is one of the most versatile species of farm livestock. Canadian breeders utilize specialized lines depending on the product they will market: milk, meat or fibre. Dairy goats are selected to be the most efficient at producing milk; market goat breeds are raised for their meat, called chevon, and goats used for fibre production have been selectively bred for the quality of their hides and fleece.

Some of the breeds that are used for milk production are Toggenberg, Lamancha, Alpine, Saanen and Nubian.

The Pygmy goat is a small breed that originated in Africa. They produce milk that is high in butterfat. Their offspring can be raised for meat and they also make ideal companions and pets. The Boer goat has been selectively bred for meat production. Angora and Cashmere goats are prized for their fibre production.

For more information on breeds, click here: [www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds](http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds)

## GOAT TRIVIA

- Goats are finicky eaters that take a lot of time to search out the best snacks. They will often stand on their hind legs to reach the best part of foliage that may be out of reach of sheep.
- Angora goats will grow 2.5 cm of mohair per month. The mohair will cover their entire body, extending down to at least the goats' knees or preferably to their feet.
- Goats are often used as companions for horses. The saying "Got Your Goat" refers to the theft of a racehorse's companion goat before a race, with the intention of upsetting the horse and possibly affecting the outcome of the race.
- Goats are very social animals that make great pets and companions for other livestock.
- To most people in North America, the term milk is synonymous with cow milk; but on a worldwide basis, more people drink goat milk than milk from cows.
- Goats are good mothers, and will adopt orphaned animals, even if they are a different kind of animal. Goats have even been used to nurse horses.
- Goats love to play and climb, and will turn anything into a toy, including fallen trees, hay bales and milking stands.

- **Buck:** Male Goat
- **Buckling:** Young male goat
- **Capretto:** Meat that comes from kids
- **Chevon:** Meat that comes from adult goats
- **Colostrum:** The first milk that any animal (including humans) produce after they give birth. This milk helps to pass along the mother's immunity to disease to her offspring
- **Dam:** Mother goat
- **Debudding:** Removing the horns just as they are starting to grow. Most dairy goat farmers remove the horns at an early age for the sake of safety for both people and other animals.
- **Doe:** Female Goat
- **Doeling:** Young female goat
- **Kid:** Newborn Goats
- **Polled:** Breeds of goats naturally born without horns
- **Ruminant:** A hooved animal that digests its food in two steps: first by eating the raw material and regurgitating a semi-digested form known as cud, then chewing the cud (a process called ruminating). Ruminants have four stomach compartments and include cows, goats, sheep, bison, elk and deer.
- **Wether:** Castrated male goat



Goat  
FACT SHEET

## Goat - The Product

### What Comes From Goats?

There are three different lines of products from goats – milk, meat and fibre – and each has to make it to market in a different way.

The goat industry is enjoying renewed popularity for its dairy production in Canada. Goat milk is collected by milk brokers and sent to processors to be made into cheese, yogurt, ice cream, fluid milk, butter fat and powdered milk.

The goat milk industry is one of the fastest growing livestock industries in Ontario. The majority of these dairy goat farms are in the south-central and south-western parts of the province. Ontario Goat estimates that about 40 million litres of fluid goat milk are being produced annually in the province. Even with this increase in production, supply cannot fulfill the demand as milk processors continue to expand their markets into other provinces and the United States.

Goat milk has also found its way into the marketplace in cosmetics such as soaps and moisturizers.

Goat meat is called chevon and kid meat is called capretto. Canadians may not be familiar with chevon, but in many parts of the world, it is a predominate source of meat protein. Ethnic communities consume chevon during the Easter and Christmas holidays resulting in a high seasonal demand period.

The market for chevon is mostly local, selling at places like local farmers' markets, on-farm markets or through special orders. Some of the larger herds sell to buyers who provide chevon to specialty and ethnic markets in large urban centres such as Toronto. At the moment there is not enough chevon produced, nor is there enough of a demand, for it to be regularly supplied in chain grocery stores. Most farm-raised meat is sold as live animals to buyers, individuals or at sales barns. There is also a large export market for Canadian breeding stock, especially to the Caribbean and parts of Europe.

The two types of goats that produce fibre are called Angora and Cashmere goats. Mohair and cashmere fibres are sheared or combed from the animal, washed and dried, then carded in preparation for spinning. These batches of fibre are called rovings and are often found in long continuous rolls if machine prepared; if hand prepared, the rovings are smaller and resemble handfuls of fluff.

Mohair and cashmere fibre production is the smallest sector of the goat industry.

Angora goats grow mohair: a strong, soft white fleece that is a hair, not wool. Goats raised for their mohair fibre are shorn twice a year, usually in the spring and fall.

Cashmere wool is the fine undercoat on the longhaired Cashmere goat that is collected by combing when the warm spring weather arrives or collected from the bushy areas where the goats browse. The wool is soft and fine but lacks the strength and luster of mohair. Many producers sell their mohair rovings privately to consumers or mills, or have it processed and returned to them for cottage industry purposes.

Goat hides are often made into leather products and drum skins and there is also a market for raw, unwashed fleece.

### About Goats – Additional Website Links

#### For More Information Contact:

Ontario Goat:

Visit [www.ontariogoat.ca](http://www.ontariogoat.ca)

Canadian National Goat Federation:

Visit [www.cangoats.com](http://www.cangoats.com)

Canadian Goat Society:

Visit [www.goats.ca](http://www.goats.ca)

Canadian Meat Goat Association:

Visit [www.canadianmeatgoat.com](http://www.canadianmeatgoat.com)

British Columbia Goat Breeders Association:

Visit [www.bcgba.netfirms.com](http://www.bcgba.netfirms.com)

Alberta Goat Breeders Association:

Visit [www.albertagoatbreeders.ca](http://www.albertagoatbreeders.ca)

Saskatchewan Goat Breeders Association:

Visit [www.saskgoatbreeders.com](http://www.saskgoatbreeders.com)

Manitoba Goat Association

Visit [www.manitobagoats.com](http://www.manitobagoats.com)

Goat Association of Nova Scotia:

Visit [www3.ns.sympatico.ca/gans](http://www3.ns.sympatico.ca/gans)

Syndicat des producteurs de chèvres du Québec:

Visit [www.chevreduquebec.com](http://www.chevreduquebec.com)

Tour both a Canadian dairy goat and a Canadian meat goat farm on line at [www.virtualfarmtours.ca](http://www.virtualfarmtours.ca)

#### Sources:

[www.ontariogoat.ca](http://www.ontariogoat.ca)

[www.canadianmeatgoat.com](http://www.canadianmeatgoat.com)

[www.clrc.ca/associations/goats/statistics/goats2009.pdf](http://www.clrc.ca/associations/goats/statistics/goats2009.pdf)



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