# Your First Goat Project

Congratulations on selecting a 4-H Goat Project!  Goats can be lots of fun to raise and make a great project for all ages.  If you are just starting, this handout will give you some resource ideas and basic information to keep in mind.

## Getting Started – Dairy or Meat Goats?
There are 2 divisions of goats you may choose to raise.  Dairy goats are used for milk production and Meat goats are bred for producing meat.  There are different breeds of goats within these types.  You will need to decide if you are raising a goat as a breeding project, a market project, or both.  Breeding animals are raised in order to breed and produce young for you.  Market animals are raised with the intention of selling and/or butchering them for food.  It is a good idea to learn all you can about any animal project before you actually acquire that animal. This way you will be well prepared for the care you will need to give and expenses you may incur.  The internet is a good resource.  There is a great website put out by our Maryland Small Ruminant Specialist, www.sheepandgoat.com, that has lots of great information including links to basic goat needs and the types of goat you may be interested in.  There are lists of resources you may find useful, especially for meat goat production.  The American Dairy Goat Association, www.adga.org , sponsors shows and offers information specific to dairy goats and dairy breeds on their site.  Several workbooks are also available for purchase through your county extension office that will help you learn as you research your project.  There are also many goat breeders in our area that can help you if you have questions.  There are usually several workshop opportunities throughout the year where you can learn more about your project.

Make sure you have a safe place to house your goat with adequate space, ventilation, available water, and shelter.  Feed requirements will vary based on the type of goat you choose.  Talk to a veterinarian that you intend to use to see what vaccinations and other health considerations you should be ready for.  They can help you gather items for basic first aid and health maintenance.  A client/patient relationship with your vet is very important.

Look to your county 4-H newsletter for deadlines on ownership requirements and identification for your animals.  Dates are important to follow if you plan to exhibit your goat at county or state fair.  If you have questions, you can always call the office and speak to one of the 4-H educators.

## Breeding Goats
The breed of goat you choose will depend on what you plan to do with the animals.  Research and think about your marketing options or what you want to use the animals for before selecting a breed.  Breed Associations can help you locate breeders who have available stock.  Learn about the conformation and type necessary to be a good representative of your selected breed.  Breeding meat goats will become replacement animals in your herd and provide young for sale or market projects.  If they are breeding dairy animals, they will produce young for sale

and you will also be milking your goats and will need to consider what you plan to do with the milk your goat produces.  Again, if you plan to exhibit the animal, you will need to look at what requirements are for registration and identification to be eligible. Registered breeding animals of both types need to be transferred to the 4-H'ers name and commercial meat goats need to be ear tagged with a Maryland 4-H tag.

## Market Goats
Market animals may come form meat or dairy background (although those bred for meat production will perform better in shows and produce more meat for their size) and are raised with the intention of selling and/or butchering them for food.  If you are raising a market animal as a 4-H project, you will need to be sure to pay attention to the weigh-in and tagging date.  You will bring your goat in at this time to be weighed and ear-tagged for identification as your project animal.  Rate of gain and weight requirements will be posted for you so you can see how much you need to have your goat gain to qualify for the county fair sale.

You may choose to raise your goat for your own family to eat later, have a private buyer for it, or try to get it in the county fair or state fair sale.  Look for sale requirements in the fair information to be sure you know all the rules.  If you do meet sale requirements, you will need to talk to people you know or do business with, and encourage them to come bid on your goat.  Remember, it takes at least two bidders to get the price up!

## Record Keeping
Part of the 4-H experience is keeping records of what you have done.  In the future, you will have to do this a lot, so it's good practice now!  There are record sheets for you to fill out with all the information you have kept over the year.  You may want to print one out (they are available on our county 4-H website) and update it throughout the year.  Keeping a calendar that lists all your activities and expenses is a big help in working through your record sheets later.

## Other activities
4-H provides lots of opportunities for learning by doing in the livestock project area and other county events.  You may want to look at participating in livestock skill-a-thon, livestock judging, county demonstration day, or public speaking.   What you get out of your 4-H experience is equal to what you put into it.

**Like all 4-H projects, the goal of the program is for you to learn and have fun doing it! We all know we can learn more every year, regardless of how long we have been working with a particular project.  The most important skills you will develop are those life skills like decision making, responsibility, goal setting, and sportsmanship.  These things will stay with you no matter where your life's path may lead.**

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