

*Reprinted with permission from: Leafy Spurge Symposium and Proceedings.  
Lincoln, NE. July 22-24, 1992. 5:7-9.*

*Sponsored by: United States Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service,  
University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE, DowElanco, Nebraska Leafy Spurge Working Task  
Force.*

---

## **Cashmere production in the United States**

H. L. JENSEN

*RR 3, Box 144 Cozad, NE 69130*

Cashmere fiber is the fine underdown produced by cashmere goats. Cashmere is a type, not a breed of goat. Any breed of goats, except angora, can carry the gene for the soft underdown known as cashmere. Any goat producing this down in sufficient quantities is called a cashmere goat. There is no such thing as a "pure-bred" cashmere goat. The goats produce a fleece consisting of the very fine, crimped down and the coarse straight guard hairs. A goat that does not display both types of fiber should be avoided. These fibers must be separated, either by combing the down out or by a commercial dehaier after shearing. The separated guard hairs are used in rugs or for hair canvas to be used in the construction of tailored garments. The longest, finest down is used in knitted garments and the other down in woven fabrics.

Garments made of cashmere are prized for the unique feel of the fiber. It is very soft, very warm and very long wearing. Cashmere feels much softer to the skin than wool, and while it is not as strong as wool, cashmere outwears wool. Cashmere has long been known as the fiber of kings, and the demand has always exceeded supply.

The majority of the world supply of cashmere has come from Iran, Outer Mongolia, India, and China. In recent years these countries have been in such political disarray that the cashmere supplies have been disrupted and manufacturers are looking for more stable supplies. New Zealand and Australia have been producing cashmere for about 15 years. The first Australian sale of cashmere fiber was in December of 1980. However, feral (wild) goats were captured and the breeding process started several years earlier.

It is interesting to note that both in Australia and the United States, many of the leaders of the industry are women. Women seem to have a natural affinity for the goats, both in size and temperament.

Cashmere herds can be developed in several ways, depending upon the grower's situation, no one way is superior to another. Prospective herd members can be selected from either dairy goat or meat goat sources. Since cashmere down growth begins about the longest day of the year and stops on about the shortest day, selection should take place during the later part of this time. Shortly after the down growth stops it will be naturally shed if it is not combed or sheared. When determining if a goat has the down, the guard hair should be parted to search for the down underneath. If the goat carries the gene for

down it can, over time be developed into saleable amounts. A very tightly crimped down is most desirable, the crimp is called the character or style of the fiber. The diameter of the fiber must be under 19 microns to be considered cashmere. The usual range is 16 to 19 microns, however selected goats may have fiber as fine as 14 microns. A yield of at least 30% down in a fleece is desirable, but that is a goal and not the average by any means. Buyers pay on the down weight or weight of dehaired fiber, not the weight of the entire fleece.

Goats come in many colors and combinations of colors, but solid colored goats are preferred. The cashmere down is either white, brown, or gray solid colored goats. The less desirable down from mixed colored goats is either classed as white with color or mixed color.

Some growers have imported goats from Australia or New Zealand, where much of this selection process has been in progress for some years. These goats, as a herd, or used as breeding stock to improve the selected native goats, will produce greater returns more quickly than will native stock. It must be noted that there are many very good goats among the native stock. Their fiber diameter is apt to be smaller, but the length and yield of fiber is much less. The aim would be to keep the finer diameter and increase the length and yield through selective breeding. Dramatic results in fiber are shown in crosses of imported bucks and native does, these crosses are called F1 or bred-on crosses. It must be remembered that crosses with angora goats produce a fiber with very limited uses, the fiber is called cashgora. Cashgora does not have the characteristics of either cashmere or mohair. Angora goats do not produce angora, rabbits produce angora, and angora goats produce mohair. Mohair by itself is a beautiful fiber of an entirely different type: long, coarse, and wavy, and should be kept strictly separate. Mohair diameters run from 20 to 40 microns. Great care should be taken to avoid any angora infusion into a cashmere herd, it will greatly increase the yield of fiber, but the fiber combination (cashgora) is very undesirable.

The spanish meat goats from Texas and the Southwest are a source of breeding stock that produces big meaty goats. Of the dairy breeds, Toggenburg, Saanen, and Nubian are being used with good results. Pygmy and Fainting goats are being used by some growers. Good-sized goats with wide, thick, meaty bodies will bring more income when goats are sold for meat or culled. Large bodies can also produce more hair if they also have dense hair follicles.

Goats are browsing animals and can be pastured with sheep and cattle, since each species prefers different plants. Goats prefer brush, tree leaves, and rough plants. They are being used extensively for pasture improvement and in reforestation areas. Ranchers in the high plains are finding them useful in controlling leafy spurge. Goats will also destroy multiflora rose, red cedar, and many other problem weeds and brush. When growing plants are not available the goats will need to have supplemental feeding of hay and perhaps grain. Does need extra feed prior to breeding. Pregnant does need good feed in order for the fetus to develop hair follicles. To assure big healthy kids, nursing does need good feed.

Goats have special fencing needs both to keep them in and to keep predators out. Fences should be four feet in height. Five wire electric fences constructed with three hot

wires and two grounded wires work well. Existing fences can be used with the addition of a 12 inch outrigger electric wire, located about 12 inches above the ground. Goats like to go under or through obstacles. Other types of fencing are also used. If woven wire is used, care must be taken that the mesh size is large enough that the goat can withdraw its head without the horns catching in the mesh or small enough that they cannot get their heads through the mesh. The larger size mesh allows the kids to escape so it may not prove satisfactory. Horns caught in the fence or the crotch of a tree become life threatening, not only from predators, but from other goats. While goats are not aggressive toward humans, they are not always kind to other goats who cannot defend themselves and can do serious or lethal damage with their horns in very short time.

While it may seem desirable to dehorn the animals, a goat raiser will soon discover that horns are very useful, they are the only handles these animals have. A goat without horns is hard to control and most shearing stands depend on horns when securing the goat for shearing. Care should be taken not to damage a young goats horns by rough handling. A frightened or startled goat is apt to jump or flail around and handlers should always use caution or prevent injury from the horns. Eye injury is the greatest concern. For safety, both for the handler and other animals, the sharp point of the goat's horn may be clipped off using a bolt cutter or similar device.

Health problems of goats are similar to those of sheep. They are subject to both internal and external parasites and pneumonia. Their hooves may need to be trimmed, depending on the walking conditions, rocky ground usually takes care of the problem. A good health care program that includes vaccination for most diseases can be established between a grower and a veterinarian.

Goats are hardy animals and kidding problems are nothing any experienced livestock person would find unusual. The umbilical cord should be treated with 7% iodine to prevent infection. (C and D) antitoxin should be given immediately after birth. The gestation period for goats is usually 150 days, but may vary a day or two on either side. With proper management it is possible to get three kid crops in two years. Twins are common in older does and triplets are not uncommon. Does may be bred to kid when a year old if they have made sufficient growth before breeding. Male kids should be removed from the herd at four months of age, since they usually reach sexual maturity at this age. Accidental breeding can take place if they are not removed.

For those interested in securing more information about starting a cashmere goat operation the following references should prove helpful.

Cashmere Producers of America (CaPrA)  
1-800-FOR-GOAT

Concerning Cashmere (bimonthly publication from CaPrA)  
1-800-FOR-GOAT

American Cashmere Growers Marketing Coop (ACGMC)  
Cashmere America  
95 Ute  
Kiowa, CO 80117  
303-621-2874

Ranch Magazine  
P.O. Box 2678  
San Angelo, TX 76902  
915-655-4434

Cashmirror Magazine  
P.O. Box 639  
Toledo, WA 98591  
206-864-4200