

Future of U.S livestock production may be in more goats and lambs
Lamb and goat prices will be more competitive with beef in the future,
experts predict.



A future in goats? (photo B. Payne)

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Thousands of livestock scientists got a glimpse of the future at the Joint Annual Meeting of the American Society of Animal Science, the American Dairy Science Association and the Canadian Society of Animal Science in Kansas City.

The conference centred on meeting the expected global demands of 2050, said David Fernandez, Cooperative Extension Program livestock specialist at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

The world's population is predicted to reach 9 billion by 2050; about 60 percent more food will be needed. Meat consumption is expected to rise as the world's population becomes wealthier. China is expected to lead the change in the demand for meat, Fernandez said.

With U.S. cattle herds at their lowest since the 1950s, the beef supply is low while demand remains strong. This is pushing cattle prices to record highs. Ag

economists Glynn Tonsor of Kansas State University and Lee Schultz of Iowa State University predicted strong prices through the next three years. Both predicted that the U.S. cow herd will not recover to its record high 1970s era in the foreseeable future, if ever.

“This means prices should stay strong unless external factors such as changes in the Farm Bill, country of origin labeling issues, government shutdowns or feed prices change significantly,” Fernandez said.

Sheep and goat producers can take advantage of this situation, Fernandez said. With meat production down, a demand for more meat and beef prices up, lamb and goat prices are more competitive.

Sheep and goat producers need to better manage parasites and parasite resistance to dewormers, Fernandez said. Rotational grazing with short grazing periods helps reduce parasite numbers. Productivity and profits can improve with better pasture management.

Sheep and goats improve pastures by reducing weeds and brush. Cattle producers can add one or two sheep or goats per cow without affecting production of either species, control weeds and brush without spraying and produce more meat per acre, according to Steve Hart of Langston University.

Several presenters pointed out the potential improvement in production efficiency by altering the production cycle to more closely follow the changes in forage quality. For livestock producers with warm season grass pastures, calving, lambing and kidding would best be done in May or June, but by adding a cool season annual such as ryegrass, the pasture could provide improved nutrition in March or April.

Stockpiling warm season grasses can extend the fall grazing season as can annual cool season grasses. Producers with largely cool season pastures, mainly fescue in Arkansas, can add warm season annuals for better summer grazing and stockpile fescue for early fall grazing.

Adding legumes, such as clovers and vetch, can reduce the need to add nitrogen to pastures and increase protein content of the forage.

“Perhaps one of the most unusual ideas was a ‘cowless’ cow herd,” Fernandez said. Producers can breed heifers using artificial insemination and sexed semen to get nearly all female offspring. Heifers can be sold as replacement heifers, bred heifers or kept as dams for the next generation. By weaning the calves early and feeding the dams for about 60 days, the dams can be sold as 30-month-old slaughter cows that will still grade choice.

“There is no need to try to breed difficult two-year-old second calf cows because they have all gone to slaughter,” Fernandez said. By choosing an easy-calving bull, birthing difficulty can be kept low. While this idea may not be for everyone, it bears investigating if you are one of the better heifer developers, Fernandez said.

