



# featured

## Ranch's goat production

### Dennis and Lucile Taylor

Nestled in the foothills of the Laramie Mountains near La Prele Reservoir, Dennis and Lucile Taylor operate their Wyoming Boer Goat Ranch about 20 miles southwest of Douglas.

His great-grandfather, Dennis Leman, homesteaded there in the mid-1870s, and the bedrooms in their house occupy the original cabin.

Lucile is the county clerk for Converse County, a job that keeps her busy, and Dennis holds down a part-time job outside the ranch operation. Altogether, it makes for a very long and busy day.

Dennis chuckles while pointing out he is a fourth-generation rancher but a first-generation goat rancher.

Dennis and Lucile started the goat operation in 1995. This east-central area of Wyoming underwent five years of drought, and Dennis said he had to sell most of his cattle. He kept 10 head and is rebuilding the cow herd. They also have horses.

In 1995, he purchased some dairy goats to help his sister feed some bum lambs. "I originally bought some goats to feed some orphan lambs and then developed an interest in the meat-type goat," Dennis says.

The couple made the choice to raise Boer goats, which are bred for their meat, in 2001 when they purchased 27 head from a breeder in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The couple's Boer goat herd consists of 100-125 does – 35 registered and the rest are full blood or percentage blood does. Many may not understand that Boer means "farmer" in their country of origin – South Africa.

Goat meat is an important food source. The American Meat Goat Association lists goat meat as the most widely consumed meat in the world. Goat has a strong ethnic significance and is a major food in the diets of many ethnic cultures throughout the world.

Although interest in raising Boer goats for meat is strong, the Taylor's most enjoyable reason for

raising them is to see the response between youths and goats.

"You cannot believe the magic that happens between a child and a goat kid when a young person owns a goat of their own," Dennis quickly points out. "It's pretty much raising kids to help raise kids."

Goats have the perfect personality for youth projects. They are not aggressive but are smart, social animals that love to follow you, are easy to trim and handle, yet small enough for children to work with. Ultimately, they develop a special bond with children, he says.

Dennis says he first noticed the kid-kid relationship while watching his grandchildren playing with goats in the corral. "The kid (goats) and the kids were having a blast climbing in and out of the bunks and jumping from one spot to another," Dennis says.

The goats also have an effect on adults. His oldest daughter teaches and coaches volleyball at a school in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and he notes, "When she gets home you can catch her in with the goats just wandering around watching them. I don't know. Maybe it's stress release."

The grandchildren also show the goats at regional competitions. "At every show, you can see the interaction between goats and kids. Great 4-H projects," says Dennis.

Boer goats are also very versatile. Goats can transport supplies into an area on small carts, and many are used in the mountains as pack animals by wildlife and wilderness enthusiasts due to their easy manageability and low impact on the environment. The goats are also used to reduce plant materials around buildings by grazing, thus reducing the chances of wildfire. Boer goats can control weed infestations in environmentally sensitive areas near streams and lakes where most herbicides cannot be safely used.

# landowners

## began in response to drought



Fencing is the most important consideration for herd management. A woven wire fence with 9-inch spacing on one side of the fence post and two electric fence wires on the inside of the pen seems to work best.

"You have to have the 9-inch woven wire for Boer goats because of the horns," says Dennis. "The goat will get its head through the spacing but cannot get it back out if the opening is any smaller, and it will eventually choke down and die. The electric wire keeps the goats from rubbing the other wire down – and they will rub it down without it."

Producers may want to give consideration to hiring a herder if the goat operation is going to be large or if the goats will be used for vegetation control.

Dennis is on the board for the Mountain States Meat Goat Association that represents Utah, Idaho, Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming. The association promotes and markets meat-type goats. Does and bucks are marketed by a cash price, while wethers, a castrated goat, usually sell by a contract for a specific weight range.

The problem in Wyoming is getting enough goats at market weight to make up a required load (600 70- to 80-pound goats).

The potential for the small-acreage landowner plays a critical role in the marketing process. "With several people producing small numbers of goats, it gives us the chance to put together more loads at the ideal weight. It also allows us the opportunity to sort the goats for more uniformity," says Dennis.

Dennis indicates he and his wife initially did not write a business plan for the operation; however, since 2001, he has received help from the Converse Area New Development Organization and has written a business plan.

"The business plans helps you focus on the business. It helps to write down your goals, see what the business is doing, and change some things you have always done in the past that were not working that well," he says.

Dennis is in the process of receiving certification as an American Boer Goat Association judge and would like to judge meat-goat shows. He could be the first certified Boer goat judge in Wyoming.

Anyone with an interest in raising Boer goats can go on-line to the Livestock for Landscapes Web site at <http://livestockforlandscapes.com> or the American Boer Goat Association [www.abga.org](http://www.abga.org).



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