MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Marketability of Sheep and Goat Meat in Mississippi

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), as of January 2024, all sheep, lamb, and goat inventory in the U.S. totaled 5.03 million head and 2.4 million head, respectively—both down 2 percent from 2023. Moreover, production in Mississippi totaled 99,000 head, representing a 2 percent increase from 2023, while meat and goat totaled 21,000, up 11 percent from 2023. The marketability of sheep and goat meat in Mississippi is shaped by a combination of factors including including demand and consumer preferences, health and nutrition trends, economic factors, environmental impacts of production, and the development of new products.

Figure 1. Sheep and goat meat.

Consumer Preferences and Demand

Sheep and goat meat, referred to as mutton (when it is from adult sheep) and chevon, respectively, have been integral to traditional cuisines around the globe for centuries. Their distinct flavors and textures set them apart from other common meats. Research shows that the demand for sheep and goat meat is increasing globally, driven by growing consumer interest in diverse and exotic flavors and the associated nutritional benefits. Moreover, changes in dietary habits, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions have led to an increase in consumption, making it the 4th most consumed meat worldwide. In the U.S., the demand for goat meat has increased in recent years, exceeding the domestic supply. Also, with increased immigration trends from Hispanic, Caribbean, African, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian populations, Mississippi has a diversity culture index of 55.9 percent. Therefore, this population diversity offers a wealth of untapped niche markets for producers to target.

Health and Nutrition

Goat and lamb meats offer unique nutrition and health benefits, a rich source of protein, polyunsaturated fatty acids, vitamin B12, vitamin B2 (riboflavin), calcium, selenium, magnesium, copper, zinc, and potassium, with a digestibility as high as 90 percent in humans.

Economic Factors

Shifts in feed prices, export demand, and trade policies can impact market prices, but overall, sheep and goats remain a cost-effective choice for budget-conscious consumers. In 2024, the retail price for mutton was between $2.68 and $4.02 per pound, while the approximate wholesale price range for U.S. goat meat was between $2.74 to $4.56 per pound.

Impact of Meat Production on the Environment

Compared with other meat types, sheep and goat meat can be considered an environmentally friendly alternative source. The methane emissions released during the production processes for goats are lower than those of other domesticated ruminants per unit of body weight (Figure 2). This can be attributed to the animals', especially goats', ability to adapt to changing climate and, feed and water shortages, and their high efficiency in converting feed. Research shows that methane emissions can be effectively reduced through a combination of practices, including limiting concentrate intake, using specific feed additives, and improving pasture management.

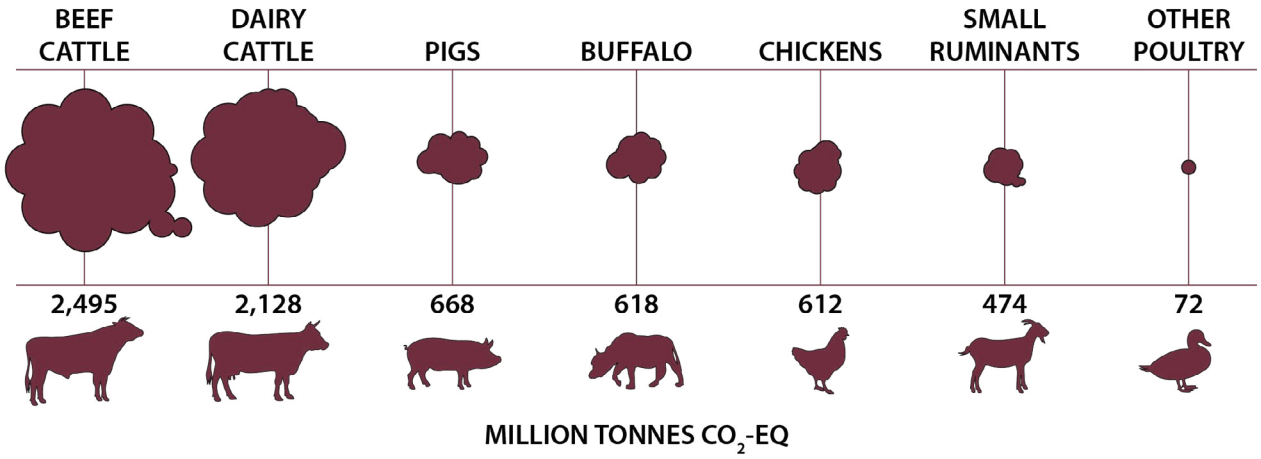

Figure 2. Methane emissions from different livestock. Source: Opio, 2017

Potential Market-oriented Sheep and Goat Meat Products

In general, market-driven strategies in food innovation and the development of novel sheep and goat products are highly valuable. Given the diversity of cultures in Mississippi, its potential for increased production of sheep and goat meat, and, most of all, Mississippians' willingness to explore culinary options, Mississippi is ideal for fusion cuisine. These products include dried and semi-dried items such as charqui (jerky), dried cured goat legs, sausages, slow-cooked lamb or goat stews, lamb burgers, goat frankfurters, goat patties, goat nuggets, smoked goat ham, and sheep pastrami.

In Mississippi, there are approximately 10 U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA-FSIS) and state-inspected facilities (Table 1). These locations provide slaughter and value-added processing services to small ruminant producers. There is also an alternative option through custom-exempt meat processing, in which animals are processed specifically for personal consumption. Meat processed in this manner is not subjected to continuous inspection under the USDA and cannot be sold commercially.

Table 1. FSIS-inspected facilities in Mississippi.

Name	Establishment Number	Address	County	Contact Number
Mississippi State University Meat and Muscle Laboratory	M45533	315 Wise Center Drive, Starkville, MS 39759	Oktibbeha	(662) 325-0169
Pitcock Processing, Inc.	M47720+P47720	425 Liberty Hill Road, Pope, MS 38658	Panola	(662) 563-9627
A Cut Above Processing and Meat Market, LLC	M47585	6295 Caesar Necaise Road, Perkinston, MS 39573	Hancock	(228) 365-9291
Attala Frozen Foods	M46656	515 W. Jefferson Street, Kosciusko, MS 39090	Attala	(662) 289-2561
Blue Sky RE, LLC	M47506	44 A Old Highway 49 S., Richland, MS 39218	Rankin	(601) 353-7100
Cutting Edge Meat Company LLC	M47223+P47223	180 Industrial Park Road, Leakesville, MS 39451	Greene	(601) 394-7711
Home Place Pastures	M45945+P45945	1789 Home Place Road, Como, MS 38619	Panola	(662) 292-5808
Homestead Farm and Packing, LLC	M46011+V46011	265 Pat Eubanks Rd, Lucedale, MS 39452	George	(601) 947-6446
Julie's Pasture to Plate Meat Market and Processing LLC	M47442	2551 Highway 26 East, Lumberton, MS 39455	Pearl River	(228) 697-8996
Kased Brothers' Halal Meats	M21442+P21442	7422 Highway 570 West, Summit, MS 39666	Amite	(601) 684-0319

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