



## Making money from feral goats

This information sheet outlines ways farmers can utilise the feral or 'wild' goats grazing on their properties.

Goats can be mustered in and a cut taken annually, for meat returns of \$25 to \$30/head. Goats also provide weed control, estimated to be equivalent of around \$20/hectare.

### (1) Goats hidden opportunity

Feral goats are a hidden opportunity for many of New Zealand's hill country farms. For little or no inputs, apart from occasional mustering, the feral goat can provide an extra return to a farm business.

Currently, most of the goat meat processed in New Zealand is from feral goats.

Before slaughter, goats must be identified in accordance with the Animal Identification Act 1993. An animal status declaration has to be filled in and signed before the goats can be transported and processed/slaughtered. Processing plants may have particular rules regarding processing of feral goats so farmers are advised to check with the plant.

Regional councils also have different rules for farming/harvesting feral goats. Check with your local council.



Mustering feral goats.

### (2) Estimating numbers on the farm

Feral goats are transient so it can be difficult to get accurate information on numbers present on a farm. Recording numbers culled by hunters over several months can be an indication.

### (3) Why bother mustering them in?

Using information from the Goat Monitoring Project, a typical case study farm was developed to show the benefits of running and 'harvesting' feral goats.

**Table A: Case study example farm with 2000 feral goats (static and transient)**

TOTAL FARM SIZE (ha)	2000
EFFECTIVE AREA (ha)	1400
STOCK UNITS PER HECTARE	9.5
TOTAL STOCK UNITS	13,300
ESTIMATED STATIC GOAT NUMBERS	1500
ESTIMATED TRANSIENT GOAT NUMBERS	500

#### (A) CARCASS RETURNS OF \$25 TO \$30

In the example, anywhere between 30% and 80% of the goats are killed in one year (based on 1500 static goats). The average carcass weight is 12kg.

In this case study, the returns per goat over a number of years were as follows:

2003/04	\$25.78/hd
2004/05	\$23.61/hd
2005/06	\$26.41/hd
2006/07	\$30.72/hd

Farmers should target particular animals for culling.

- All unwanted bucks (the better bucks to be kept for mating purposes).
- All older does and wethers.
- Those with a carcass weight of 12kg (approximately 30kg liveweight).

It may be that if numbers increase, the target carcass weight may need to be dropped to increase the numbers killed. For example drop optimum range to 10.5kg carcass weight.

## (B) WEED CONTROL SAVINGS OF \$20/ha

Feral goats are valuable in their ability to control of weeds such as blackberry, gorse, ragwort, briar and thistles. On this case study farm the main weed types are blackberry and gorse but due to the goats presence, the farmer does not spend any money on weed control.

It is estimated that on the 2000ha property, this equates to a saving of \$40,000 per year (or \$20/ha). Conversely, based on 2000 goats, this is a \$20/hd contribution to the farming enterprise.

## (4) Summary of benefits

If feral goats exist on your property, it pays to capture their benefits both in the form of returns from meat and control of weeds. There may be some competition for feed between goats and other classes of stock. Therefore culling goats via mustering and sending them to the processing plant is one way to recoup feed losses.

**Table C: Gross Margin per goat using case study example**

AVERAGE INCOME PER HEAD \$	26.63
ESTIMATED SAVINGS ON WEED CONTROL \$	20.00
NET ADVANTAGE PER HEAD \$	46.63

In this example, running feral goats then culling a proportion returns a gross margin of \$46.63/head. Feral goats should be seen as a positive and an opportunity to a farming enterprise.

## (5) Mustering tips

### FENCING

Feral goats usually move freely about the property, crossing fences. A traditional boundary fence is a nine wire post and batten.

### MUSTERING AND YARDING

There are different mustering techniques used. Mustering can be undertaken by a skilled farmer with skilled dogs or

there are professionals who will muster for a proportion of the profit.

The initial mustering and yarding experience will be important for both the farmer and the goats, to create a positive experience. This reduces stress on both parties. Remember goats can be trained over time, provided they are in the right environment.

Mustering may occur annually or more regularly. Timing will depend on your property, policies, weed and goat numbers. A popular time is to muster in the March-April period.

Goats have regular daily grazing routines and rest areas. If the places and times are known they can quickly be found. Approach them early in the morning for example 5am or early afternoon if not too hot. They will be more difficult to move when it is a wet, dull day or at their resting times.

Keep focused on the mob and not individual animals. For moving the mob, keep it steady, with the flow uphill and along fence-lines.

When mustering keep to the same pattern. The older animals that are returned will start to learn the routine. Goats are difficult to control but are good to train.

Take a quiet (or standoff) heading dog and work from an appropriate distance as not to cause flight.

Existing yards can be used, such as sheep yards with high sides, cattle yards with blocked in sides, deer pens or woolsheds. Avoid wet, muddy ground conditions. Avoid stressing the animals. They will flow better when they can see exit and entry points. If using a race, it should be between 0.6 to 0.7metres wide.

## (6) Costs

In this case study, there was no animal health cost. By the nature of their grazing, the level of parasites that goats are exposed to is minimal. Some properties use mineral blocks however.

### Acknowledgements & more information

MAF Sustainable Farming Fund, Meat & Wool New Zealand, Mohair New Zealand and the NZ Boer Goats Breeders Association funded the National Goat Monitoring Project.

Other Information Sheets from Meat & Wool New Zealand cover information on returns from farming goats, fibre goats, intensively-farmed meat goats and extensively-farmed goats.

For copies phone Meat & Wool New Zealand on 0800 696 328 or visit [www.meatandwoolnz.com](http://www.meatandwoolnz.com)

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