

Expanding local outreach with Small Ruminant Producer and Youth Programming

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Situation

Livestock production is a prominent industry in Oglethorpe County, accounting for over \$65 million annually to the local economy. As small farms gain popularity in the area, sheep and goat ownership is on the rise. The Oglethorpe County Extension Agent observed producers dealing with poor animal health due to limited education on best management practices for sheep and goats. In addition to commercial production, participation in youth livestock exhibition of goats is increasing state-wide.

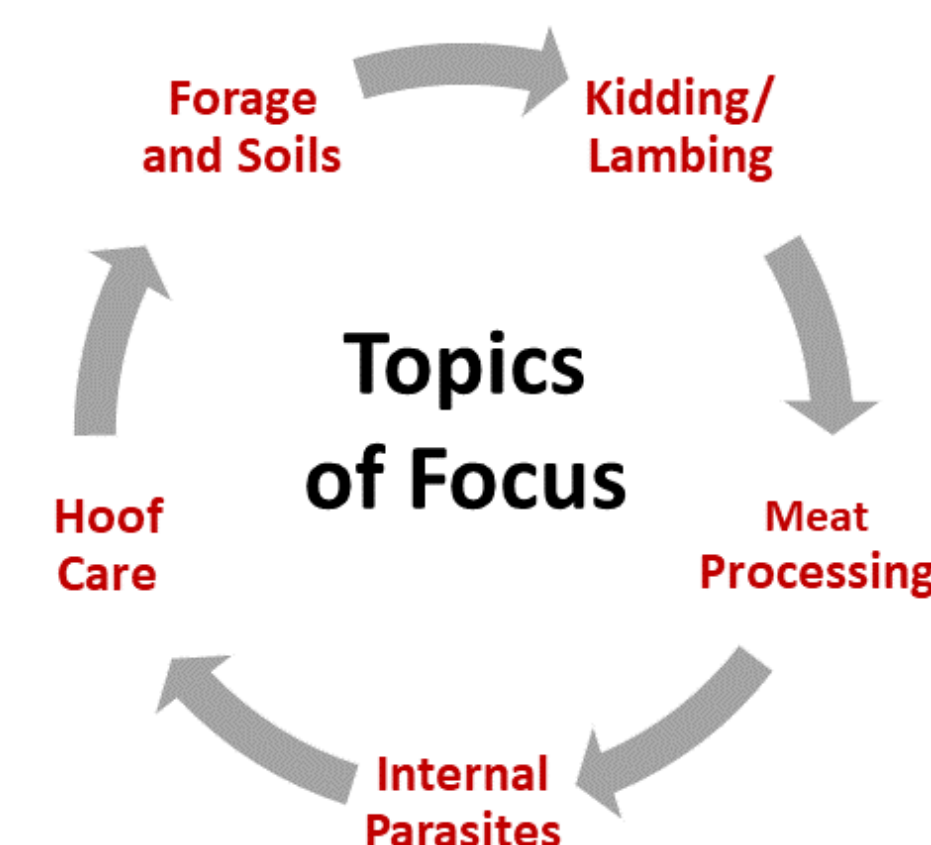
Response

The Oglethorpe County Extension ANR Agent developed curriculum and coordinated quarterly meetings of local sheep and goat producers. Youth livestock programs were expanded to include local record book clinics, a livestock judging team, and a youth breeding doe show.



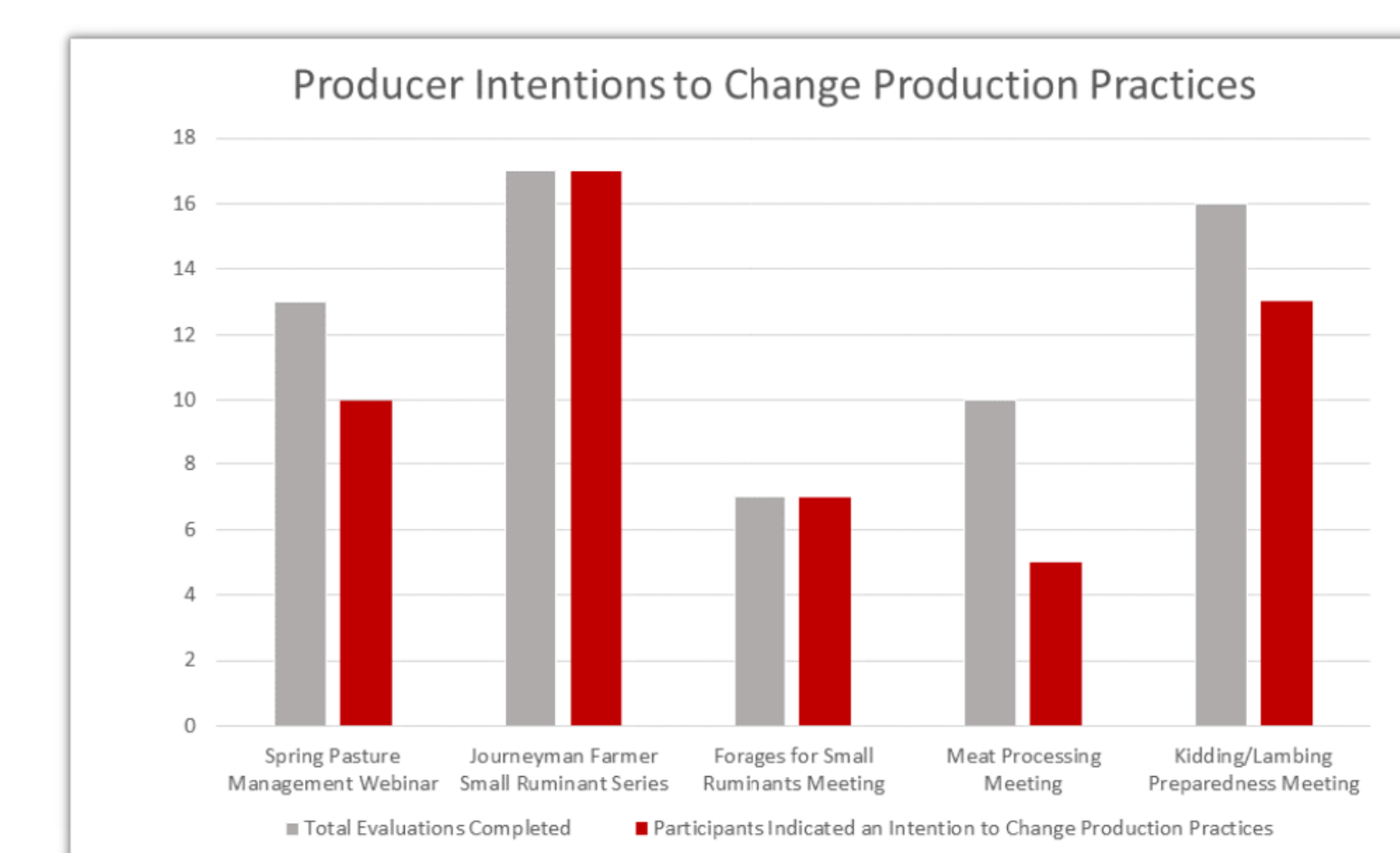
Methods

- Producer meetings include a management topic discussion led by Extension specialists, agents, or industry professionals and a hands-on demonstration of husbandry practices.
- Articles are written for the local newspaper.
- Fact sheets on best management practices were developed for use in the local Extension office and on site visits.
- Producers were given live access to a goat farm birthing barn camera during the 2020 kidding season.
- "The Christmas Classic" is a fun filled Christmas themed breeding doe show for youth exhibitors throughout the county and state.
- Increased support of youth livestock activities on the county and state levels encouraging youth to pursue extra opportunities in the realm of animal production (ex: record book awards, livestock judging, Georgia bred and born competitions)
- Collaborations formed with local 4-H Agent and community volunteers to establish 4-H goat club activities.



Results

- A database of 44 producers was created for communication.
- 3 trained on fecal flotation testing to identify internal parasite loads.
- A free online FAMACHA® certification opportunity was provided in cooperation with Fort Valley State University and Virginia State University Specialists. An estimated 7 local producers have certified.
- Agent articles have increased Extension exposure. The Agent is an invited contributor to The Bleat quarterly newsletter and also had an article featured in UGA Extension's Integrated Pest Management newsletter.
- The 4-H Goat Club hosts an average of 6 youth at monthly meetings.
- The county has 8 new youth participating in showing, livestock judging, or record book competitions.
- The Christmas Classic show had 54 youth exhibiting 103 goats.
- Many collaboration opportunities have surfaced. The Agent partnered with 2 Agents to conduct the Journeyman Farmer Production certification course in 2020. Instructional goat showing videos were produced with state youth livestock specialist. The Agent serves as a director on a state board for club goat producers.
- Written evaluations indicated 100% likely to modify production practices based on information gained. Producers indicated they intended to implement a variety of new practices including nutritional flushing, a controlled breeding season, a lambing kit, soil testing, over seeding pastures, and rotational grazing. Each of these changes in behavior has the potential to result in future increased profits and sustainability.



Local producer assessing parasite load

Impact

The added programming has been a tremendous success as demonstrated by positive evaluation responses and repeat attendance. The agent has observed more responsible chemical use and better animal husbandry practices among sheep and goat farmers. Two local producers have reported purchasing their own microscope and fecal egg count equipment for parasite management as a result of Extension education. Local newspaper coverage of the small ruminant producer group success increases public awareness of Extension services. The Agent is invited to site visit small ruminant farms in the county 4 times more often than before producer meetings began. Youth have developed lifelong skills in animal husbandry, animal evaluation, project management, record keeping, and public speaking.