

Stephens County Small Ruminant Production Meeting

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UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION
Stephens County



Figure 1: Stephens County ANR Agent Thad Glenn teaching participants about the importance of proper soil fertility and pasture management.



Figure 2: Fort Valley State University Small Ruminant Specialist Dr. Niki Whitley teaching participants about small ruminant production in Georgia.

Program Need/Goals

The annual Farm Gate value for small ruminant production is valued at \$116,250 here in Stephens County and growing. The majority of these producers either sell show quality stock or raise animals for meat production in local markets. In addition to the established producers in the county, many new farmers are beginning in small ruminant production. Many see this as a cheaper entry into farming when compared to raising beef cattle as the average cost for an adult goat is 133% cheaper on average than an adult cow. Some of these producers are starting these small farms as homesteads for mostly family consumption of the products small ruminants produce. However many of these newer producers have little experience in small ruminant production or general farming principals. Educating small ruminant producers in the county on the basics of pasture management, animal health, and animal selection makes established producers more profitable and sustainable while also ensuring newer producers have a positive first experience with farming.

Response

The Stephens County Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent in collaboration with the Small Ruminant Specialist at Fort Valley State University and sponsorship by the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council and the Stephens County Soil and Water Conservation District held a Small Ruminant Production meeting on December 4th, 2019. 25 producers from 4 Georgia counties and 1 county in South Carolina attended the meeting. The Stephens County ANR agent spoke about the importance of soil sampling, proper soil fertility, and forage management for small ruminants operations. The primary focus of the ANR agent's presentation was on the importance of soil sampling and proper fertilizer/ lime applications to optimize forage production for grazing small ruminants. The Fort Valley State Small Ruminant specialist spoke about animal nutrition, maintenance and health, reproduction, and selection.

Impact

A post program evaluation revealed that 86% of the participants found the information shared to be useful and interesting. The evaluation also revealed that 81% of the participants had an improved knowledge of small ruminant production practices. The evaluation also asked attendees what they intended to do differently on their operations after they attended the meeting. 40% responded they needed to modify and or change their animal health protocol primarily dealing with parasite control and deworming. 32% responded they needed to focus more on their soil fertility and pasture management practices primarily commenting about needing to take soil samples. 16% of attendees responded that they needed to change an aspect of their reproductive plan on their farms and try to synchronize breeding as much as possible to take advantage of specialty markets. 12% stated they needed to address their overall herd selection and improve the genetics of their herd. Participants were also asked if they would be interested in an in person FAMACHA parasite training course at a later date in which 92% indicated they were.

Collaborative Partners/Funding Partners

Fort Valley State University

Chestatee- Chattahoochee RC&D Council

Stephens County Soil and Water Conservation District

Willard Kimsey Environmental Education Center