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Texas AgriLife Extension Service

Livestock options for vegetation management

Source: Dr. Rick Machen, Professor and Extension Livestock Specialist, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Uvalde

Grape growers are probably more interested in 'commercial' livestock rather than high priced registered animals. Most of the associations represent purebred or registered seedstock breeders (except American Meat Goat Assn and Texas Sheep & Goat Raisers Assn). Grape growers could purchase purebred/registered animals at a premium (to commercial market prices) and then most likely sell the extra, unneeded or unwanted animals for commercial prices. The old buy high, sell low marketing strategy is not palatable for anyone in the long term.

For this reason, I have included market report links for the three major sheep & goat auction markets in Texas. These are published weekly and will keep grape growers abreast of the current market prices. If grape growers were looking to purchase 'grazers', these are the prices I'd use for budgeting purposes.

Again, IF your growers could work an arrangement with producers who already own livestock, such could be a win-win for grape and livestock growers alike. And where feasible, mechanical vegetation control will in my opinion be the most economical, expeditious and effective means to control vegetation in the buffer areas around vineyards.

That said, there is some aesthetic value associated with goats and Longhorns. My experience during tours of Mondavi vineyards in California was that the goats received much more attention than the grape vines.

Contact information for pertinent livestock associations:

American Boer Goat Association <http://www.abga.org/>

American Meat Goat Association <http://www.meatgoats.com/>

Texas Sheep & Goat Raisers Association <http://www.tsgra.com/>

Texas Longhorn Breeders Association of America <http://www.tlbaa.org/>

Links to market reports from the three largest goat markets in Texas:

Fredericksburg Contact: Wayne Geistweidt (830) 997-4394

http://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/am_ls312.txt

Goldthwaite Contact Harlan or Heath Hohertz (325) 648-2249

http://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/am_ls310.txt

San Angelo Contact: Benny Cox (325) 653-3370

http://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/sa_ls320.txt

Notes from conversations with Dr. Rick Machen, Extension Livestock Specialist, and Jose Pena, Extension Ag Economist, Uvalde

Carrying capacity equivalents: 1 animal 'unit' = 1 cow & calf (<1000 lb total) = 5 sheep = 6 goats.

Livestock grazing expenses \$400-500/ac/yr for fence repair, water facility repair, pasture maintenance, veterinary fees, labor [7 hr/unit/yr], winter and midsummer dormancy feeding, predator control.

Convert brushy bottom land to crop land \$300/ac; clear slopes \$500-600/ac; remove big trees \$400-700/ac.

Fencing must be appropriate. Net wire (47") with 2 lines of barbed wire on top (51-54" total) costs \$1.5-2/ft. Other estimates are from \$3.00-8.00/ft, with the higher estimate for deer-proof fence. Small animals may require predator control, primarily fencing.

Strategy should be rotation grazing, because ideal stocking rate may vary 10-fold between drought and rainy periods. Under ideal conditions, maximum stocking rate is between 0 and 2 animal units/ac. The right number of animals/ac is always a challenge. Irrigation costs for center pivot from 50-75' water depth are \$4.50/ac-inch; from 300' with 125 hp electric motor, \$12.50/ac-in (estimates do not include \$2/ac/yr maintenance and repair). Forage requires a minimum of 10" water/crop/season.

Restocking is expensive: 60-80 lb young goat in the last 12 months ranged from \$0.85-1.60/lb. Animals are most expensive in spring, less expensive in late summer.

Alternatives are to work with an entrepreneur in your area who needs access to additional grazing. Arrange for animals to be transported to your site for a nominal fee (transportation plus a little for overhead).

Goats prefer woody species over grass; browse line <6'. Hair sheep are not good at browsing, <3'.

Longhorn cattle are not good at browsing, but can be aesthetic. There is often a 2-fold price difference between longhorns bought at a sale barn vs. breeders (with registration papers). Current sale barn prices for open heifers 500 lb. \$250-300; cow \$500-700; bull \$500-700.

A problem with any browsing plan is that certain problem plants are not eaten until animals are starving and aesthetics have been reduced. Some combination of mechanical and chemical control will be needed. Some known supplemental hosts have no or limited browsing. No animals eat Mexican hat (upright prairie coneflower). Sheep and goats eat only young sunflower and young western ragweed. Sheep eat only young giant ragweed.

Animals graze/browse tall dense vegetation from the top down and the outside in. Growers will learn when to call for animals to be removed.

Mechanical vegetation management (tractor and shredder) is most cost effective.