

WE KID THEE NOT

A look at the goat milk industry

Having arrived back from a sabbatical and rather long lunch, *Snout* received a communication from a dairy farmer situated in the Land of BROOC (Braaivleis, Rugby, Oranjejag and Canned Lions). It was all about the cruelty of the goat milk producers, the products of whom are becoming a serious threat to the dairy cow industry, because of the increasing demand for goat milk. But lest it be thought that her real concern was diminishing profits for the suppliers of dairy milk, the farmer hastened to inform us that she personally had more business than she could cope with and therefore was not wanting to bring the goat milk industry into disrepute. No, her motivation was purely philanthropic. She simply wanted to see people behave in a more ethical manner towards the animals in their care.

Now as every Snoutian ought to know, the dairy industry does not generally look kindly upon the birth of the male of the species, owing to their lack of mammary performance and resultant paucity of profits in a world where animals have become mere commodities. Whereas in the dairy cow industry bull calves are still of some use, even if only to be sold off for a profit later, the billy-goat kids are not so fortunate. Usually they are forcibly removed from their mothers at the age of four days, when they have their throats slit. The females of the species are allowed to live, as long as they continue to act as sustainable milk factories.

What started this farmer on her mission was feedback received from a friend who attended a meeting of the S.A. goat milk producers held at Nelson's Creek in October 2007. The contents of the letter suffered somewhat in translation, but only because it would be impossible to reflect the level of insidiousness of language used and the total commodification of sentient beings under the mantle of caring. But the gist of it is as follows:

Whilst there are some farmers who allow the new born billy-goats to suckle from their mothers until they're weaned, removing them at night and only milking the nanny-goats once a day (on a share basis as sometimes happens in the case of dairy cows) it seems most of the goat milk producers slit these little creatures' throats at the age of four days, which is when the colostrum stops and profits start, in the form of saleable milk. Others end these pathetic little lives with 'a shot to the head and dropping them into a trench.'

The major argument against sparing these little billy-goats is the cost of raising them, both in time and money and, at the end of the day, money is what it's all about. So day four it is.

Besides, there's another real problem. Some farmers are VERY scared of theft, as they live on a plot near a township. If there were too many goats on their property, these would be stolen. The farmers also do not want their workers to get the impression that the infant billy goats have an economic value. So there's just one solution: Slaughter on day four.

But goat farmers are not without feelings. At least two of them, from Prince Alfred and Fairview respectively, admit to feeling very sad when they have to do this as "they love each one of them." The Fairview farmer even allowed a young goat to live after "she broke her neck and it set completely skewed. She (the goat, not the farmer's wife) felt very embarrassed about her appearance."

Having been assailed by this attack of anthropomorphism, the magnanimous farmer decided that she would be allowed to board there for free – "the other goats' milk would pay for her keep."

But we digress. The little billy-goats who are permitted to reach 6 – 8 months of age, are "sold to blacks for slaughter" at R700 - R 800 a pop, so excellent money is made while passing the buck, so to speak. Any goats not disposed of in this way are considered "subsidised guests", a costly exercise indeed, considering their "voracious appetites."

Clearly this cruel practice needed to be stopped by caring people and so the anonymous guest at the S.A. Goat Milk Producers' meeting had a bright idea to counter the 4th day slaughter abomination.

The solution was to attach a commercial value to the baby billy-goats and then articulate a decent argument, based on sound economic principles, for the sparing of their lives for six to eight months before slaughter, which would make the cut throat business, well, less cut throat. She was convinced of the fact that some people did not think and this would then hopefully get them thinking. (And presumably the workers would start thinking too – Ed.)

As a starting point, she put forward a six point plan which could be used as a positive argument, thus a sustainable agricultural idea. Here it is, in her own words then.

1. Ceremonial and religious reasons.

"There are many religions – Muslim, Africanist, Hindu, as well a various cultures such as Greek, Spanish and Portuguese that do eat goat meat and who slaughter goats ritually on an on-going basis. The flesh of young billy-goats is deliciously soft and tasteful, provided they are castrated within the first two weeks."

2. Health

"In the U.S.A. there is a great focus on the health benefits of goat meat, as it contains so little fat."

3. More goat milk sperm banks with good genes can be initiated at various locations

"Such progeny would be of advantage to any indigenous goat herd in Africa. Their (the goats') daughters would immediately have a greater capacity for milk production which would be of advantage to any poor family as they would be able to sell the extra milk. The fact that these billy-goats would be pedigreed and from a good gene pool would in itself

add value. (besides aiding the Proudly South African Campaign – Ed)
One should also join forces with an international NGO such as Heifer International which would want the billy-goats for their upliftment projects among the poor.“

4. **Goats of both sexes can be shorn; their hair is of considerable value**
"Cashmere is an important fibre and very expensive. Much more research will have to be done regarding this. If the billy-goats can be shorn it would pay for their board and lodging. Their hair is shorn once a year – this can start a whole new industry as it is a renewable resource. The Australians have much more information about this.“
5. **Rent-a-Goat for the consumption and eradication of invasive plants**
“N and I thought of hiring out 5 – 6 little billy-goats in order to consume and eradicate invasive plants. Each would be tagged and micro-chipped and would do useful work. They can also be put to pulling little carts in petting zoos, provided they are castrated.”
6. **Save-the- Male-Goat Care Stations**

“It occurred to me that there could be various places in the country where the little billy-goats can be raised. There are enough altruistic people, but it is not easy.

I think animal rights activists would only add fuel to the fire and then the dairy milk farmers would go ‘underground.’ Then one no longer knows what happens.

So I don’t think this is a long-term solution. It costs a great deal of time and money to raise these young billy-goats. There are great logistical problems to ‘saving’ so many little animals and then they die of stress, dehydration, a lack of suitable milk and a plethora of illnesses. One has to plan properly.

I personally have a deep distrust of the SPCA and such. They play on people’s feelings and their monies are not properly managed. The animals are not necessarily better off because they are ‘saved’ by uninformed people. Believe me, these goats are clever and they will escape and cause chaos. They are NAUGHTY and WILFUL.”

“I think it’s possible to find a workable solution.

Nobody with whom I had a discussion enjoys slitting the throat of a beautiful little billy-kid. They are simply too adorable and sweet for words. However, they become very dangerous if they are not castrated.”

“Not everybody has the balls to keep a herd of billy-kids. They (the billy-kids) can easily weigh 90kg to 110kg. I have seen how dangerous they can be when the ewes are on heat. They destroyed huge gates at J and

S's and got over unbelievable fences to get to the ewes. Furthermore, they have massive horns that can easily gouge out one's eyes. I think one should rather look to a model which will ensure that the little billy-kids are accorded an optimum economic 'worth.' Then at least they can live until 6 – 8 months old."

Knowing that *Snout* had a propensity for being neither emotional like the animal welfarists, nor irrational like the animal rightists, this was sent to us by the farmer in the hope that it would "prove useful" and at the same time demonstrate that the milk industry was really all heart, if not all balls.