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## RANCHER DISCOVERED "HIDDEN" TALENT

# Look What They're Doing With Goats!

Goat raisers around the world are taking a serious look at the money-making possibilities of using goats as pack animals for hiking or mountain climbing.

Sparkplug behind the idea is Wyoming goat rancher John Mionczynski, of Landen, originator of goat packing. Since discovering their "hidden talent," he's been doing a booming business selling his self-designed Bully Goat pack saddle, operating his "rent a goat" packing service for hikers and mountain climbers, and conducting seminars to share with other goat producers the "profit making potential" of using goats as pack animals.

Mionczynski, an experienced horse packer in mountains, first discovered the value of goat packing in 1972 when the U.S. Forest Service asked him to track a herd of Bighorn sheep. When horses were unable to handle the rough, steep terrain, Mionczynski hit on the idea of equipping Wether Vane, one of his sure-footed goats, with a pack saddle for carrying the delicate and expensive radio equipment used to track the sheep.

"I discovered that Wether Vane was much better than a horse on steep mountain terrain. One thing led to another and before long I was in the goat packing business, supplying pack goats to area backpackers."

## SON'S 4-H PROJECT TURNED INTO MONEY-MAKING ENTERPRISE FOR DAD

# Farm Sideline Keeps Illinois Farmer Hopping

That's no ordinary shed standing in Dan Schwartzkopf's barnyard near Woodhull, Ill. The 20 by 65-ft. insulated building is a rabbitry that houses more than 300 purebred rabbits.

The rabbitry contains approximately 360 wire cages stacked 3-high in four rows. Pens range in size from 20 to 32-in. for does to 16 by 30-in. for growing bunnies.

Schwartzkopf raises primarily Californians, Cremes, and Dutch rabbits. He says rabbits usually bring \$.60/lb. for fryers (between 4 and 5 1/2 lbs.) and \$.25/lb. for

roasters (anything over 5 1/2 lbs.). Although Mionczynski uses mainly wethers, he notes that "the average goat will make a good pack animal with training. Goats are intelligent and they're fond of humans, a real virtue for packing since they generally want to go where you go. Rough and steep terrain doesn't bother them. And, unlike a horse or llama, they won't wander off and don't have to be tied.

"As a rule of thumb, a goat can pack a load equal to 25 to 30% of its weight, which means a 200 lb. wether can carry 50 to 60 lbs. I start training them at about 4 to 5 months of age. With a few hours training each day, they're ready to go out on their own in about a month. They have to be broken to cross streams since they have a natural fear of water," says Mionczynski.

He sells his Bully Goat pack saddles for \$95 each, plus \$48 for a set of canvas saddle bags (panniers), and \$22 for a saddle pad. He also sells pack-trained goats in pairs for \$150 each. "My best customers are couples of all ages who like to hike in the outdoors and use pack goats to carry their camping gear."

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, John Mionczynski, Mountain Goat Ventures, Box 250, Rt. 62 (Atlantic City), Lander, Wyo. 82520.

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Although Schwartzkopf sees an increasing demand for rabbit meat because of its low fat and low cholesterol content, he makes more money by selling breeding stock to other breeders and 4-H club members than in selling the animals commercially. He will receive \$10 apiece for 3-month-old rabbits to be exported to China.

Schwartzkopf feeds the rabbits a pellet feed that he buys for about \$218 per ton. He feeds them each evening. Depending on the breed, one animal may eat between 5 and 8



Dennis Fett and Debra Buck's breeding flock includes rare all-white peacocks.

## EASY-TO-RAISE EXOTIC BIRDS MAKE GREAT CONVERSATION PIECES

# Business Is Booming For Peacock Farmers

"We've got customers in all 50 states and we're going to more than double our business this year," says Dennis Fett, a teacher from Minden, Iowa, who's developed a booming sideline business raising and selling peacocks and peacock-related books and products.

Fett, and his wife Debra Buck, started their peacock business in 1981 almost by accident when they were looking around for unusual pets for their "hobby" farm. They bought a batch of eggs in Nebraska, out of which only one bird hatched, but that was enough to get them started.

Today they have a flock of four different peacock varieties and they plan to sell 500 fertile eggs and hundreds of chicks and full-grown breeding birds this year. Fett has also authored a book on raising and handling peacocks and the couple sells jewelry and Christmas ornaments made out of peacock feathers.

"Many farmers buy peacocks as conversation pieces but we've proved it can also be a good business to get into," says Dennis, whose wife Debra also raises parakeets and other exotic birds. "Peacocks are easy to raise and don't require any special care. They can withstand temperatures down to 20° below zero so they don't require much in the way of special housing. They feed on the same grains as turkeys or chickens. During summer months they'll feed on bugs if allowed to roam. Free-running birds always seem to look healthier and prettier than penned birds, perhaps because of the way they supplement their diet with insect

treats. Each mature peahen will lay between 15 and 20 eggs a year. The birds live about 25 years and produce eggs till death. Their highest production years are ages 2 to 10."

Fett notes that there's an active market for peacock feathers from craft people as well as commercial manufacturers. "The male begins to grow his colorful feather train in its second year. At first there are only a few round spots, or eyes. The third year the cock will reach full color. They drop their feathers, or molt, each year in late July or August. Soon after he loses his train, the cock begins to grow new feathers and by February or early March you can see the eyes on the new feathers. By the time the males are in full color, the females are ready to mate."

Full-grown peacocks range in price from \$20 to \$150, depending on variety and age. Unhatched eggs sell for \$4 to \$8, depending on variety, with a minimum purchase of four eggs. The eggs can be dormant for up to 15 days before incubating so Fett ships them out under first class mail but doesn't guarantee hatchability. "The sooner you start incubation, the better. Our on-farm hatchability rate is about 95% but it may be 50% or less when shipped." Fett's book on peacocks, which details all aspects of running a peacock operation, sells for \$15.95, including postage.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Dennis Fett, Iowa Peacock Farmers, Rt. 1, Minden, Iowa 51553 (ph 712 483-2473).

oz. of feed daily with a 3-to-1 conversion ratio.

One buck can service between 10 and 20 does. The gestation period for rabbits is 30 to 31 days, and after giving birth, the does can be re-bred immediately. Litter sizes vary according to breed, but commercial breeders work toward litters of 8 rabbits that will reach 5 lbs. in 8 weeks, explains Schwartzkopf. He artificially inseminates rabbits year-round but says, "Anything you get between Thanksgiving and the first of March is a gift."

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Dan Schwartzkopf, RR, Woodhull, Ill. 61490.



Photo by Diane L. Beeler

Rabbits have a 30 to 31-day gestation period and can be rebred immediately after giving birth.