

## St. Elmo's Goat Farm

Elmer Rivera , Bgy. Calo, Nasugbu, Batangas



In 1999, two years after I graduated from the Araneta University, I started venturing to goat raising. With a loan from my employer and some of my fathers' s retirement money, I set up our one (1) hectare land in Bgy. Calo, Nasugbu, Batangas.

We planted it with napier, the predominant forage during that time. Few months after that we started buying native and upgraded goats around our area and nearby towns, with the intent of supplying the goat meat requirement of our neighboring places.

I encountered lots of difficulties during the first few months and years of my project. Since it was not my full time job, I can not be with the animals the whole time.

Factor in, inexperience and lack of establishments to copy it from. My farm was experiencing huge mortalities. I graduated with a degree in Agriculture major in Animal Science but we barely tackled the subject "goats" during college days. Maybe because the times was not calling for it. Goat farming was not an industry at all, back then. Smallhold farmers are the only ones interested in raising these curious creatures. Needless to say, my project went wayward. Most of my animals are dying and I have no clue what's causing it. Some of them survived but the damage has been done. Very few breeders and goat meats were sold. I have to close shop.

As I was busy doing other things like keeping my day job and other things to make a living a few years after that incident., and after some research and enlightenment, backed with experience and newfound guts, I venture again with a vengeance. Boer was the "hit" breed during those times and everyone wants to have one or at least and upgraded one.

I started buying native does and sell their upgraded kids. Presto, P 5,000 is easy. Imagine buying does for another P 2,000 and a year after, they will give you P 10,000 ( Two kids @ P 5,000). It was easy, I was making a killing! I even asked friends from Mindanao for "artificial insemination" on my goats. My farm got the highest success rate on the basis of conception and birth. I got superior genetics from Mindanao and had it put on my native does. It was all just management. We had to time everything from their arrival at the airport, transit to my farm, which doe is ovulating first, everything in conjunction.

But if you try to figure it out, I still can quit my day job which was the ultimate goal. Free from pressure of your work, free from pressure of your boss. The only pressure you get is coming from yourself. Which is not so bad since you made it anyway.

Enter....dairy goat production! Since I understood how goats behave and sort of knew how to take care of them ( I'm using the phrase "sort of" because goats are always full of surprises.) Goats are very unique and complicated animals you see. Having the idea of goat dairying for quite sometime, I started asking around. The different government agencies and dairy farmers have been very helpful. Much of the system we are using are patterned after them with the exception of a few goats that makes the goat a truly unique animal. Like most of the farmers I've been to, are grazing their animals. You cannot do that with goats. Goats would wander around walking a bit and eating a bit resulting in loss of energy and time. Plus you have the goat's risk of damaging their udder through contact with shrubs and thorns, since they have lower structure than cows. And when you decide to bring their food to them no matter what kind of feeder you make, goats will have huge wastage. It's just a given fact that when you're raising goats, it's up there with other miles of the universe, like gravity and inertia.

Then one fateful day, I sold all of my breeder goats, around 70 of them, and bought 10 dairy goats. From a farm who has dairy goats but not harvesting the milk. The goats were just roaming around vast span of land in a natural wild way. So when the day finally arrived to milk them, I was having a wrestling match and foot race with my goats. They were so wild . Some are so big, you can even ride some of them and can carry you around. But little by little, I learned how to manage them and feed them. Properly. The right forage and concentrates for their needs. The same forage you also need to take care of. When it will be cut and at what height , what are their nutritional requirements and when they are most nutritious. All of these you have to know.

Goats are unique. They will investigate anything they can see. If you change your routine or startle them, they will give you a hard time. Don't feed them right and they will get back to you for sure.

Right now, we've come to a state where it's all routinary. But before we arrive to this, we've been through a lot. But it pays well. I've quit my day job few years ago. I am now a full time goat farmer. One of the few I should say.

I have people who do the work I have experimented back then. I'm now off to making new products out of my m ilk. Will soon be making other kinds ..... of cheeses, aged and hard. Yoghurt and ice-cream are on the way. It's a new learning process, new struggles, new problems, I have discovered that life is a continuing learning process. You have to keep feeding your mind. Most of the path I have chosen are less traveled, full of hardships and struggles. Against the grain, I have yet to fully taste the fruit of my labor, but it is starting to taste sweet.

So to my fellow goat raisers, goats are really strange creatures. You have to understand their nature. You sort of have to

be inducted to the herd and bet you can all get along.

Don't give up yet. Keep up the goof fight. Keep on "goating". And remember, only dead fish swim with the current!

*As narrated to Ching M. Lumanta / January 15, 2008*  
012908