



SPECIALTY LIVESTOCK

The specialty livestock industries in Kansas are relatively small, compared to more traditional livestock production in Kansas. However, the industries that do exist are successful and have benefited from increased consumer demand. Specialty livestock in Kansas is an evolving sector that typically includes bison, goats, sheep, rabbits, alpaca, and llamas, but is also growing to include other species. These livestock operations benefit from many of the same advantages Kansas offers traditional livestock production: abundant land and feed supplies, a strong transportation infrastructure, state support for the livestock industry, and a wealth of research and knowledge about livestock health and management within the state.

Just as the advantages facing larger operations help specialty livestock, the challenges facing the entire livestock industry also present possible barriers to growth for the specialty livestock industries. Access to an abundant water supply is critical, and laws regulating water use can be problematic for new or expanding livestock operations, along with concerns

relating to workforce and transportation. The specialty livestock industries face additional challenges, because the size and unfamiliarity of these industries may make them seem a less reliable investment. There are few in-state processing facilities that cater to specialty livestock. Also, while consumer demand is increasing, that demand is accompanied by an expectation of consistency of product which is difficult for smaller producers.

Growth within the specialty livestock industries will require input and discussion among key partners to develop a long-term growth strategy. Coordination between the specialty livestock industries will be an important component, as they work toward increased access to processing and value-added facilities. Economic development and marketing programs could assist in the enhancement of existing businesses as well as the recruitment of new businesses to expand the industry. A collaborative effort between public and private stakeholders to create a strategic growth plan is critical to the future of this agricultural sector.

Status

The specialty livestock sector is very diverse in type of species, size of operations, and goals of operations. Some species have well-established markets and others are still emerging. Significant differences also exist between the needs of the different species. Kansas is home to many livestock species such as goats, sheep, bison, rabbits, alpaca, llamas and other specialty livestock. Compared to more traditional livestock production in Kansas, the size of these industries is relatively small. In 2022 USDA NASS reported Kansas ranking 14th in the nation in both meat goat and market sheep inventory. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, Kansas ranks 10th in bison with just over 5,727 head raised on 95 farms. At the time of the census, Kansas also totaled 1,551 alpacas, 514 llamas and 11,318 rabbits in inventory.

There has been increased consumer demand for meat grown locally which has increased the demand for specialty livestock meats. This has benefited many specialty livestock producers and processors. However, some specialty livestock producers may still be unfamiliar with what market opportunities exist for their growing operations.

Successes

- K-State and KDA were awarded the USDA Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program grant that they collaboratively applied for in 2022. They created a survey to better understand how to assist specialty livestock producers with enhancing market facilitation. The survey was answered by 120 producers and gave insight on what questions need to be asked to consumers in the next survey to bridge the gap between the two entities.
- Embryo transfer and artificial insemination in small ruminants has become increasingly popular in the last few years. Kansas currently has a few producers and clinics utilizing embryo transfer and A.I.
- Kansas State University has been reintroducing bison to the Flint Hills and have reached a herd of 300 head. Over the course of the 10-year research project, they have found that bison increase the biodiversity of plant species by 100%.
- Wichita is currently using 130 goats to clear five acres of brush in a city park. Additionally, Kansas City will be using goats to clean up the KC riverfront. Goats will be clearing weeds and brush in a total of three acres near the river.