

# The organic, juniper-seeking goats of Silvies Valley

Goats easy on riparian areas, work well with cattle

By Rylan Boggs  
Blue Mountain Eagle

A Peruvian goat herder opens a barn door to release a flood of brown and white Boer goats.

He steps out of the way as the goats swarm to several cut juniper trees in their pen. Like piranhas, they will pick the trees clean in a matter of hours.

Once put out on rangeland, the goats will seek and destroy junipers, eating the foliage as high as they can reach.

"It's like candy," Silvies Valley Ranch owner Sandy Campbell said.

The ranch, just south of Seneca, started their goat herd to establish an additional source of income from the same rangeland on which they graze cattle.

Goats can graze the same



A Boer goat looks up from feeding at Silvies Valley Ranch. The ranch started the goat herd to establish an additional source of income from the same rangeland as cattle.

pastures as cattle and don't share parasites. While cattle focus on grasses, goats are drawn to shrubs and bushes. The animals are great brush and weed control, according to Campbell, which helped the ranch avoid chemical weed control and become certified organic.

"We've really been impressed by how well the goats

work with the cattle," Campbell said. "They have improved the rangeland in a lot of places by getting rid of the weeds and cleaning up the underbrush in our forest areas. It's been really good for fire suppression."

While grazing, the goats are managed by three Peruvian goat herders working under temporary agricultural visas, Campbell said.

"They're very knowledgeable and great herdsmen and hard workers," she said, adding it's hard to find experienced goat herders in the United States.

Border collies help the herders, while Great Pyrenees mountain dogs protect the goats from coyotes and raptors.

Originally from South Af-



A doe rests in an indoor pen at Silvies Ranch. When in labor, mothers are brought indoors and give birth onto heated floors where they stay with their offspring for one to two days. They then move to the family pens and, when ready, back out to the winter barns.

rica, the heavier Boer goats were initially bred as show animals in the U.S., which removed many desirable range goat traits.

Since then, Campbell has been working to breed them back into "the Angus of goats."

They've crossbred them with some Spanish goats and another South African breed called Kalahari red. The end goal is to develop their own breed of hybrid range goat.

"We're breeding for big babies that hit the ground strong and grow really well on range," Campbell said.

The goats spend the majority of their lives on rangeland but are brought into barns during the winter months. When in labor, mothers are brought indoors and give birth onto heated floors where they stay with their offspring for one to two days. They then move to the family pens and, when ready, back out to the



A newborn kid takes a few shaky steps at Silvies Valley Ranch. Kids normally double their birth weight in the first month of life, Campbell said.

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Goat meat, or chevon, is catching on in restaurants and health food circles because it is high in nutrients and low in fat, Campbell said.

The meat will be a staple on the menu at Retreat at Silvies Valley Ranch when it opens in July, and they hope to sell chevon locally in the future.

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