

IOWA HISTORY



(Courtesy Library of Congress)
Goat shearing

Goats Add Value to Iowa Farms

In April 1910 the US Census Bureau reported 2,400 Iowa farmers raised over 20,664 goats and kids (young goats, not human children!) on their farms. But only 266 of those reported producing goat hair or mohair (the hair of Angora goats). If they weren't raising the goats for the fleece, why did so many Iowa farmers have the animals?

The Iowa state Board of Agriculture reported that the “most pronounced and useful trait” of the animal was “its ability to clear pasture of weeds and brush.” And the board added that goats had

added \$1 million to the value of Iowa farm land in the previous 10 years by freeing it of brush and weeds.

The board encouraged the state's farmers to consider raising more goats. While they cleared the land for the farmer, they were "practically no cost" to the farmer. They asked nothing more than a dry place to sleep and some feed when it was too wet to go outside. In the summer the goats ate weeds and left the grass for other animals; while in the winter they ate the tops of weeds and twigs exposed above the snow as well as bark from saplings—up to 6 feet high.

In addition, goats "bring forth" a "lusty kid" once a year—usually one, but often twins. And while the kids were delicate at first, after consuming heavy doses of their mother's milk they were able to stand "lots of exposure."

The Board of Agriculture encouraged farmers to raise angora goats because of their attractive fleeces. They reportedly sheared from one and a half to 21 pounds of fleece each year—the average being between three and five pounds. And mohair was anywhere between 3 and 21 inches long. Prices for mohair ranged from 16 cents to \$6.50 per pound—depending on the age and quality. (A goat at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair produced 19 pounds of hair that sold for \$4.50 per pound.)

The 266 Iowa farmers who reported to the US Census Bureau in 1910 that they had raised goats for their fleeces reported producing 8,703 fleeces, weighing 29,206 pounds and valued at \$7261—averaging \$2.48 per pound.

Sources

"Profitable Returns From Angora Goats," *Anadarko Daily Democrat*, Sept 15, 1909.

"Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910," by United States Bureau of the Census.

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