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## **Small Scale Livestock Production**

Have a few acres and looking for a way to mow the grass without a lawn mower? Is raising a few head of livestock something you're interested in? There are lots of options for small scale or backyard livestock production.

Matching the animal to the resources you have is the first step. Previous experience or knowledge could be the highest priority resource, or maybe viewing your available acreage and forage, along with fencing, could help determine your options. The smaller the animal, the more individuals you can stock. It all depends on the available forage and the nutrient requirements of each animal. In Kansas, livestock owners are required to fence in their livestock. Of course, each species has slightly different fencing needs. Consider the old adage "fences need to be horse high, pig tight, and bull strong."

Along with pairing the livestock species with the available resources, study the animal's cycle of nutrient needs. Breeding females require more and more nutrients during a pregnancy. So, timing the gestation phase of the lowest nutrition requirement to the season of the year with the lowest quality forage is a sound management practice.

Another factor is labor. The labor required is largely determined by available resources. There are numerous opportunities for decreasing chores or routines; for example, an automatic watering system will reduce labor required to fill water sources on a daily basis. If you travel or have an unpredictable schedule, select the livestock that best matches the time you have available.

Make some feeding plans. Smaller acres mean less opportunity for year-round grazing. Know the nutritional quality of your forage and its growing season. Make plans to provide nutrients for the entire time you have the livestock, even outside of the growing season. This may include bringing in preserved forage in the form of hay bales or stockpiling a part of the pasture during the growing season for later use. If you're going to bring in hay from another location, storage, and how the hay will be delivered to the animal are considerations.

Regardless of the financial goal of the new endeavor, a financial management plan is a great idea. Tracking expenses and opportunities is crucial for determining whether a profit or loss will be realized. Even if building income isn't a primary goal, understanding the profit margin could

impact future efforts. Financial tracking can show areas for increased efficiency. This data will lead to more meaningful conversations with other small-scale producers and provide valuable knowledge resources.

Knowledge is possibly the most important resource to have. This could be personal experience, a relationship with a successful producer, or working with industry professionals. I highly encourage all livestock owners to participate in learning opportunities. Seek reliable resources: veterinarians, nutritionists, extension professionals, or successful producers.

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