

EXTENSION AGENT PERSPECTIVE ON USING GOATS AND SHEEP FOR BRUSH AND GRASS CONTROL IN VIRGINIA

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ABSTRACT

The steep and forested terrain of Nelson County Virginia makes brush hogging and land clearing operations difficult for both forest landowners and people seeking to produce high value crops.

Although the use of "brush goats" has had isolated success for individuals, public interest in learning about successful employment of small ruminant foragers has increased in the past ten years as people seek alternatives to either chemical weed control materials or hiring of manual labor. Small farmers are also interested in sheep and goat meat production to answer increased demand from local residents and regional ethnic markets. Michael Lachance, an Extension agent working in central Virginia reports on successful use of Kiko goats in a start-up land clearing business as well as the use of sheep to control vegetation in a commercial vineyard and winery operation. The presentation includes information about ruminant based land clearing economics, successful enclosure technology, and predator control. Future work will focus on better evaluation of small ruminants for brush management on small Virginia farms and vineyards.