How is grazing perceived by stakeholders of the dairy goat chain in Western France?

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A picture of goat milk production in France and Western France

- France: ≈ 5000 farms, ≈ ½ on farm processing, ≈ 850 organic, ≈ 600*10^6 liters

- A positive dynamic, Smaller and “younger” production, Lack of organic milk
- Competition with crops
- Leader of goat milk production but declining

Few dairy factories and collection facilities: on farm processing
Goat farming uses very little grass

90% of goats do not pasture
Only 16% of farm relies on fresh grass

Very diversified feeding systems in goat farms
A low average self-sufficiency rate compared to dairy cow systems:
55% against 88%
Concentrates represent 46% of goat diet

Increasing demands from consumers for cheese & milk products based on grass (with goats outside)

_Bossis et al., 2014_  
_Brocard et al., 2016_
Grass: one of the leeway to improve farm sustainability

How farmers and stakeholders perceive grass/grazing in the dairy goat farms and industry?
A survey of the dairy goat chain stakeholders

Toward a representative diversity

Making of appointments

June-September 2017

20 « master 2 » students

Semi-quantitative survey

Data collection

October 2017

19 farms, 21 chain stakeholders (7 food supply, 5 advisers/extension, 4 Milk factories, 2 banks, 2 administrations, 1 educational), 3 cheese retailers and 24 consumers

Data processing

Synthetic SWOT analysis, Crossing interviews
A high diversity of interviewed farms

- **Size**: 25 to 1000 dairy goats
- **Milk** delivered to milk factories, milk to produce cheese on farm, combination of two systems
- **Milking** once or twice a day
- **Main feeding systems**: Maize silage & concentrates; hay & concentrates, fresh grass (fresh cut or grazing => 6 farms)

➢ Feeding system are well adapted to **farmers’ choices** and **plot plan**, but can be changed from one year to another
Perceptions on grazing in goat system: some shared views (1)

❖ To all the stakeholders, grazing in dairy goat system enables:
  - Boosting a positive and preserved picture of goat milk chain among consumers
  - Enhancing feed self sufficiency
  - Being less sensitive to volatility of agricultural commodities

❖ ... but leads to some issues:
  - Parasitism control
  - Fencing of pastured plots especially for large herds
  - Grass growth depends on weather conditions implying milk production variations
Perceptions on grazing in goat system: some shared views (2)

❖ To (almost) all the stakeholders, grass in dairy goat system enables better organoleptic qualities of cheese

❖ To all the stakeholders, grazing management requires high technical skills, both for farmers and advisors
Divergent views (1): is goat suitable for grazing?

**YES**
Farmers, some advisers, stakeholders of civil society:
Economic, environmental and social sustainability
Can easily be adapted
Better welfare

**Consumers:**
Cannot imagine another feeding system than grazing

**NO**
Farmers, some vets, some advisers:
“Gatherer” animal
Cannot naturally protect from parasitism
Don’t want to graze if rain, sunburn on the udder (lack of welfare)

Facing the main goat milk chain challenges

➢ Maintaining goat farms in **future** and ensuring successions of farms between farmers (ageing population of goat farmers)

➢ Increasing milk production (mostly in organic milk)

➢ Aligning consumers’ perceptions of goat farming with reality

**Grazing:** not a concern for stakeholders
Divergent views (2): facing the chain challenges

Ensuring successions of farms?

Applicants for installation

❖ Want small herds (<100 goats)
❖ Want to limit loans
❖ Want to process and direct selling

Grazing (or not)

? Too risky

Bank support

Dairy companies

❖ Want large herds (>250 goats)
❖ Want to limit variability of milk supply
❖ Want to collect larger amount (more goats and more milk/goat)

Limited grazing (hay + concentrate or conserved forage prefered)

+++ Too risky
In conclusion

- Reluctances of the **economic sector** is all the more important as goat farming is traditional in the area (*as in Jacquot et al., 2017*).
- Grazing is **not a concern** for the stakeholders.

- Grazing management **skills** need to be updated (or initiated) both for farmers and advisers (and by researchers).
- Way to better control **parasitism** needs to go forward.
- Relationships between welfare and grazing need to be investigated.
- How to reconcile increasing **herd size** and grazing?

Grazing is not the only solution to use **grass**. Need to find a middle lane to follow between producers', dairy companies' and consumer's interests.
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