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Meating a Demand

FVSU helps goat farmer with business venture

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Kroger

Meating a Demand

FVSU helps goat farmer with business venture

David and Frances Martin of Gotcha Goat pose in front of a Kroger where they sell goat meat processed at Fort Valley State University.

By **RUSSELL BOONE JR.**

If you go grocery shopping at your local Kroger store, and have the taste for goat meat, there is a chance some of those cuts may have a "Wildcat" taste.

It is because Fort Valley State University's Meat Technology Center has developed a partnership with the Gotcha Goat company based in Ellenwood Ga.

It all started when married couple David and Frances Martin, approached FVSU in 2010 to seek assistance with the production and marketing of goat meat products.

"We told them that we could process goat meat and help them get into the market," said Terrill Hollis, meat plant manager at the center. "They came up with the 'Gotcha Goat' brand, and we started processing from there."

Fort Valley State started processing goats for the company in March, and its workers process from 25 to 50 goats per visit.

"Fort Valley is regarded as one of the leading research institutions in the country for consumable goat meat

products," said David Martin, CEO of Gotcha Goat, when asked why FVSU was selected to process some of the herd produced by the company.

Hollis said FVSU was also approached because it is considered by many people to be the experts when it comes to raising goats and goat production. "We have a processing plant here on campus that we can combine with our expertise in the animal science field," Hollis said.

As part of the 1890 Land Grant Colleges and Universities Initiative established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, FVSU can provide technical assistance to new and existing businesses including cooperatives. This allows the Meat Technology Center to assist businesses such as Gotcha Goat.

Martin met with Kroger representatives to present the idea of having locally grown, fresh, and never frozen, meat on its shelves. These products are competing with imported meat from Austria or New Zealand, he said. Gotcha Goat products are now on sale in about 80 Kroger stores with most of them located in northern and central Georgia. Krogers in South

Carolina and Tennessee also carry the products.

Martin says Gotcha Goat is also talking with several other retailers about their goat meat products. He sees the demand for goat meat increasing in the United States.

"Goat is the most widely eaten meat in the world," Martin said. "As individuals migrate from other countries, they will demand the product. Also, once people learn how to cook goat meat, it will replace other meats."

Goat is considered to be the healthy red meat, and has less cholesterol and fat than any other red meat. It also has less fat than chicken, according to Martin.

Frances Martin, Gotcha Goat CFO, is happy the product is getting to market, but she feels the work is far from over.

"Initially, I felt relieved when we were allowed to stock our product in the store," said Martin, who thinks that was the first step to reaching a huge potential market. But, "the real work is just getting started," she said. People already eat goat meat, Martin said, but she is hoping



At Fort Valley State, Bruce Dobbs, Gotcha Goat's board chairman, packs meat for shipment.



Frances Martin, Gotcha Goat's CFO, displays meat on sale in a Kroger store.

Gotcha Goat helps expand the American market to the point where goat is just as common as beef, pork or chicken.

Frances also said that the company is working expanding its base by producing a range of products including ice cream and cheese made from goat milk, and goat bits for salads.

"Fort Valley is going to help farmers develop and maintain the well-being of their herds," Martin said, when describing the college's role in helping meet the anticipated increase in demand for goat meat.

The Meat Technology Center's manager said Fort Valley State has a good reputation for providing people knowledge needed to make their business prosper.

"FVSU can cover all aspects, from farming to business to livestock," he said. "FVSU can provide them what they need to keep everything going."



Above: At FVSU's Meat Technology Center, Gotcha Goat workers Yesuf M. Yesuf (left) and Richard Taylor cut and package goat meat.



Below: Gotcha Goat herd grazes before being processed.



During a visit to Fort Valley State University's Meat Technology Center, U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service Deputy Under Secretary Brian Ronholm (2nd from the left) shares a moment with FVSU representatives and Richard Woods (far right) of the Georgia Department of Agriculture's meat inspection division.

USDA Approved

Government official impressed by Meat Technology Center

The work at Fort Valley State's Meat Technology Center does not go unnoticed. Brian Ronholm, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service Deputy Under Secretary, visited the facility this year. He wanted to see firsthand the processing of goat meat at the site. Ronholm also felt the visit was a great way to interact with, and become educated by, meat processors and their operations.

"The amount of work that [workers] are able to do in such a small space, the products they are able to provide and the services they are able to provide for the community is very impressive," Ronholm said.

-RUSSELL BOONE JR.

