

# Arkansas NRCS Fact Sheet



Photo Credit: Heifer International

## Biological Treatment of Herbaceous Weeds with Small Ruminants

Sheep and goats provide an excellent alternative to controlling undesirable weeds. Sheep and goats have more flexible lips compared to cattle which allow them to better ingest specific parts of the plant. Sheep tend to graze close to the ground while goats tend to browse on plants at head height and above.

The grazing characteristics of small ruminants results in the animals being able to better target high quality plant parts such as green leaves. Therefore, small ruminants can meet their daily nutrient demands comparatively faster than cattle because of their grazing preferences and characteristics.

### Benefits

- Control of state identified noxious and invasive weeds.
- Control weeds naturally with no herbicide application.
- Multi-species offers a variety of potential conservation and production benefits.
- Reduce the possibility of invasive weeds spreading to productive

Many plants that may be considered weeds to a cattle producer are considered desirable plant species for sheep and goats. Cattle prefer to graze grasses and legumes while goats prefer to consume brush, shrubs, and forbs. Sheep tend to graze forbs over grasses which may also include several undesirable broadleaf weeds. The reduction of typical broadleaf weeds and brush in pastures by small ruminants can result in enhanced grass growth for cattle.

#### Important Notes to Remember:

- \* Appropriate fencing is critical to contain small ruminants.
- \* Predators are a major problem for sheep and goats,
- \* Supplemental feeding of minerals should be done cautiously for sheep. Sheep are very susceptible to copper toxicity. Mineral supplements that are not formulated for sheep, but intended for other livestock species, may have excessive copper amounts for sheep consumption.
- \* Small ruminants are more susceptible to internal parasites compared to cattle which may increase management and labor.