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GO-OPERATIVE GOAT FARMING AND SHEEP FARMING
IN UPPER BEIARN VALLEY

Reprint files
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Nielsen - came

The first permanent settlers - Peder Nielsen and Niels Kristian Nielsen - came to the Beiarn Valley as late as in 1823. Both came from the south, from Rana. In Rana most of the farmers were tenants which could not dispose of their land the way they wanted. In the Beiarn Valley the land was not cleared. The state was the landowner and the prospects to own your own land were good. Beiarn was not far away from Rana and in the course a generation's time most of the Beiarn Valley settlement had taken place. To-day most of the farmers descend from the first settlers from Rana. Within a surprisingly short time a vital community developed - characterized of enterprise and ability to exploit the resources. People brought with them skills in many crafts and also showed good knowledge of animal husbandry.

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The usual animal husbandry at the time consisted of a cow or two, some sheep, goats and hens. As time went by and the economy based on natural resources was replaced by money economy, the demands on animal husbandry became heavier, each farmer had to have a larger livestock. However - combined milk and cattle farming was - and still is - quite common here. The natural conditions have brought forward such a combination.

Until the end of the 60-ies cow milk production was most important for the farmers here. But when a new Norwegian breed of cow was introduced for milk production, the farmers in our area had to reconsider their production. This new breed of cow was unsuited for our steep hills which could not provide sufficient summer pasture - and the necessary coarse fodder was not available from the comparatively small areas of farm land.

Therefore - 10 of the farms went together and started goat-keeping. Together they established a summer mountain pasturing company. New goat sheds were

built at each farm and for the summer mountain pasturing two production centres with the necessary facilities were established. In the beginning each ~~centre~~ had around 40-50 goats - to-day around 90 and 20-30 kid. Now we have build a third centre in the Beiam Valley and the goat sheds at home have been expanded and modernised during the last 5 or 6 years. About half of the farmers have from 10 to 40 sheep in addition to the goats.

A little about goat keeping . As I have already told, we are capable of keeping 80 to 90 milk goats in our sheds at home and around ~~80~~⁷⁰⁰ on the summer mountain pasturing centres. Because of the milk production quota regulation we do not need a larger stock. The goats are kept on the summer pastures for 3 months, with the animals from 3 farms on each centre, and we hire people to do the work there. The mating also takes place there, starting in late July or the beginning of August and is kept under control. The mating is taking care of by the farmers themselves and the job is shared between us. During recent years we have had some problems with the heat among the goats so early in the summer, ^{resulting} in a late kidding season in the spring. In many stocks this has been a great problem. Probably many factors play a role here.

The need for breeding kid lays around 20-30, so when around 100 goats kid, there is a great surplus of kid. Some of them are fed for a certain period of time - from 1 week to 1 month according to capacity. But a great number are put away and serve as dog food. The skins are not used either. Probably we have a resource here which is not exploited. The reason is lack of feeding capacity and low prices on the meat. However the meat is good so it's a pity we don't have a better solution.

The kidding season starts in January and goes on until March/April. For those of us who have sheep, their lambing season starts in early May and last for

about 1 month. So - spring is a busy time and therefore we are happy when June comes and the animals go out for the summer mountain pasturing.

With this special form of farming the Commons have always been of great importance. The goats graze in the Commons from mid June to mid September. The sheep also are set out for summer pasturing in the beginning of June. They start grazing in the lower parts of the slopes, later in the season they move further up in the mountains and cross over to the Gråtå Valley. Thus we are totally dependent of good pastures.

Not very often goats and sheep graze in the same area. But to the extent this happens, it doesn't matter because they feed on different plants. With regard to pasturing together with other animals, as for instance reindeer, this is not a big problem either. In the beginning of the season there might be a herd of reindeer, but they soon move up in the mountains or to other localities.

In connection with the construction of the Glomfjord/Svartisen water power system, the water flow in the Beiarn River was reduced to the extent that the river could no longer provide a natural fence between the two summer centres. Our company put forward a claim to the State for compensation in order to build a fence, or have a herdsman to keep the flocks separated. We were granted an annual compensation of 45.000 kroner.

Most of the grazing areas are Common Property owned by the State. For some years now there have been disagreements between the State and the farmers about the rights to use these areas without paying rent. We have claimed the right to use the areas without paying whereas the State think we should pay rent for the grazing and for the buildings put up on stateowned land. Since we started in 1968 we have been paying pasturing rent.

However - a verdict stated i 1990 that all farmers in the Upper BeiarnValley have the right to use the Common Property as grazing land for goats free of charge.

The State ^{represented by} - Statsskog - has now given us the right to pasturing and withdrawn its claim on rent with retroactive effect from 1990.

But even if we are given this privilege we are in no way secured. To-day there are many uncertain elements and things are changing within the Norwegian agriculture. We have to adapt to what goes on in the rest of Europe. With the ever increasing demands of efficiency - and given our resources - we are bound to tail. The natural conditions of small farms with no possibilities to expand our areas, and the short summer growth season, set up limitations for us.

As you have been told, an important part of our farming is done collectively between our 9 farms. We all take ^{ikvael} equal part in the farming - and all the work in connection to the pasturing centres has been carried through by joint efforts.

In fact, this house has also been built in the same way - 11.000 working hours have been used. So, getting things done by this method is quite possible.

In spite of much uncertainty connected to our activity, we still choose to believe that we shall survive as farmers in the Beiarn Valley. This year we will start building new sheds on our oldest pasturing centre. And when the costs have been stipulated to about 900.000 kroner - and we still go ahead - this fact should speak for itself.

As in many other countries, Norwegian agriculture is supported by the state according to various criteria. Without these subsidies it would not be possible for us to survive.