

Maybe Raising Livestock Isn't for You

I admit I day dream about having chickens. I want to look out my window and see happy hens scratching and pecking around outside with a protective rooster on the lookout. I also think about having goats, a pig, couple turkeys, and a mini cow. *All that food!* Fresh eggs, milk, butter, yogurt, cheese, and various meats! As I usually do, I dove into researching all about raising livestock, only to be tossed out of the clouds and into reality.



Raising livestock has largely been romanticized by the media with pictures and idyllic scenes of perfect barns, lawns, and clean farmers standing next to clean animals. Go to just about any working farm and the last thing you will see is anything pristine and clean. Even if you only have a few chickens, you will invariably end up with chicken poop on your shoes, pants, and maybe in your hair. It happens. Don't forget the smell! Farm animals stink and when it is hot out, it can be *really* bad. Can you handle that?

Just like with children, raising livestock takes a lot of work, time, and dedication. If you are wanting to have livestock that you basically toss food and water at, you may want to reconsider going down that path. Not only is it unfair to the animals, such a blatant disregard for the care of a living being can land you in serious legal issues stemming from 'neglect and poor living conditions.' There is a lot more to it than just feeding, watering, and cleaning their living space up.

When it comes to breeding and birthing time, expect to stay up late. I have watched the posts from numerous fellow bloggers with livestock who were up for 2 nights in a row because, regardless of where you live, the goats want to have their kids at 2am. You have to be comfortable with bodily fluids because when raising livestock (kind of like children), you will come in contact with all kinds. It is part of life and death.

Speaking of death, that is a part of raising livestock that few people ever really think about. A birth goes bad and you lose both mother and child, a mink gets into the chicken coop and kills 4 of your hens, or it is time to cull the flock and put the meat in the freezer. The vast majority of humans, especially Americans, are completely detached from where their food comes from or how it even ends up in the foam packages at the grocery store. I have seen stories and videos where people truly believe that they 'make' the meat at the grocery store and then are horrified when they realize that their 'organic' pork chop still came from a pig that was once alive.

Don't forget those neighbors! They can cause serious troubles for you if your chickens get loose and head over to their flower bed for a tasty snack.

The bottom line is that livestock takes a serious commitment. If you are new to raising livestock, no amount of reading will prepare you for everything. You will need to learn how to

handle them, literally handle them, so you can check for problems like Bramblefoot in chickens, Cheesy Gland in goats, or mange in pigs. Yes, those are all real (and common) ailments that you will not only have to be able to identify but also treat/prevent to avoid large veterinarian bills.

The Other Side

The flip side of all the harsh realities mentioned above is part of what makes it all worth it.

Goats, pigs, cows, rabbits, chickens – they all have their quirks. The antics of the babies as they frolic and play, the moments of obvious affection between the animals, and knowing how these food sources live all adds up to having more control over what you eat but beyond that, there are certain things each animal can do to help pull its weight on the farm. They all have a purpose on the farm and earn their keep very well if you let them.



Chickens are hilarious! They will provide hours of entertainment and distraction. Along with providing eggs and meat, they will also *work* for you in the garden! I cannot wait to let my chickens loose during pre and post gardening season so they can not only turn the soil (and fertilize it a bit), they will absolutely love all the bugs, worms, and bits of leftover plants. Your chickens are fed on the garden goodies for the day, you get your soil worked, and then get some really great eggs out of the deal. Win! **WARNING:** Chickens are

the gateway animal and you should proceed with caution as detailed in [one of my favorite videos](#) about raising chickens.

Goats are superior when it comes to clearing land up. Have an overgrown area and loathe the idea of clearing it out? Stake a goat in the middle of it on a tether and give it a little time. Depending on how large of an area you want to clear, they can do it in a day! Many states across the country use goats to clean up the sides of roads and other areas where brush fires are a worry. Letting them clear areas saves you on time, money, backache, and animal feed. You get milk and meat out of the deal, too!

Pigs are nature's trash compactor. The scraps that don't go to the compost or fed to the chickens can be given to the pigs. They will eat stuff that we won't and will also clear areas like the goats do. Got a patch of berries you want gone? Set the pigs loose! Just finish butchering a deer you hunted? Give the pig the leftovers, including bones. Pigs are omnivores and earn their keep by turning all that waste into delicious bacon, hams, pork steaks...did I mention bacon? They will also root around, turn soil, and fertilize the soil as they work it.

All these animals will give manure that can be added to the compost pile (with chicken poop, it *must* be composted. Put directly in the garden will kill everything off due to the high nitrogen and needs to be broken down) that will make more soil for your gardens that grow food for both your family *and* the livestock. Raising livestock is not easy but I prefer knowing exactly how my food was raised and treated. I like knowing that the animal was happy and I had a direct hand in their care. Going further, I will also know exactly how that food was processed and preserved. That is incredibly powerful stuff!

It's a wonderful cycle that all feeds into itself season after season. Being part of that cycle of birth, life, and death

along with the natural seasons is incredibly satisfying. When you are sitting on your porch on an early Autumn morning, warm coffee in hand and brisk air tickling your nose...all the work, toil, sweat, pain, and worry melts away. You have precious moments of peace and contentment in your little world where everything works together that most people will never come close to experiencing.

[Books on Backyard Chickens](#)

[Books on General Livestock](#)

[Books on Animal Husbandry](#)