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Employing Goats: A History

When you think of a species that is helpful to people, you may think of keystone species like bees, or animals that can be eaten, like chickens. However, there is no species more helpful to humans than the goat. Vermont is using an old technique of using goats to help humans (Associated Press). The capital of Vermont, Montpelier, has a problem of poison ivy growing in a populated spot (Associated Press). Montpelier has employed three goats – Ruth, Bader, and Ginsburg – for the sole purpose of grazing poison ivy along a popular bike path (Associated Press). Mary Beth Herbert, the goats’ owner, states that the poison ivy does not harm the goats and it will take several years for them to completely eradicate the plant (Associated Press).

The city has tried many other methods, to no avail, and were worried about the plant causing issues for bikers, children, and dogs, who are most likely to use the path (Associated Press). Organic treatments have failed, and the city is hesitant to use chemicals because of the proximity of the poison ivy to a river, so Ruth, Bader, and Ginsburg are the city’s saving grace (Associated Press).

Montpelier is not the first place to employ goats to help people out. In 2017, Spain created a “Goat Fire Brigade” to fight the wildfires that had plagued their forests that summer (Ibekwe). To do this, the goats were placed in areas to graze the parts of the forest most at risk for fires (Ibekwe). Munching on the overgrown trees and vegetation, these adorable workers clear spots for firemen to easily reach fires and reduce the risk of fires starting (Ibekwe).

If you aren’t yet convinced that goats are one of the most helpful species for humans, there is even an Ethiopian legend about them (Avey). A goat herder, Kaldi, was said to have tried the red fruit of the coffee shrub after discovering his goats’ positive reaction after eating it

(Avey). Monks then tested the fruit and had a similar, alert reaction (Avey). The legend makes it clear that goats discovered the fruit that so many would become obsessed with in the modern day.

Goats have a positive influence in the lives of humans and are never hesitant to help with issues we face; people can do the same. If we all embrace the goats and their helpful nature, the world could be a better place.

Works Cited

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