

## ISLAND INC.

# MIGHTY MUNCHERS

Gettin' the job done,  
one chomp at a time



## HOLUALOA GOAT-GRAZING BUSINESS EXPANDING

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Holualoa resident E. Chris Willcox wanted to do something different. After working as a boat captain and in the aquaculture industry, he longed to start his own business, something unique that allowed for flexibility and more time with his 5-year-old son, Cypress.

His friends, Thomas Bolton, a landscaper, and Lance McCracken, a roofer, suggested Willcox become a goat herder.

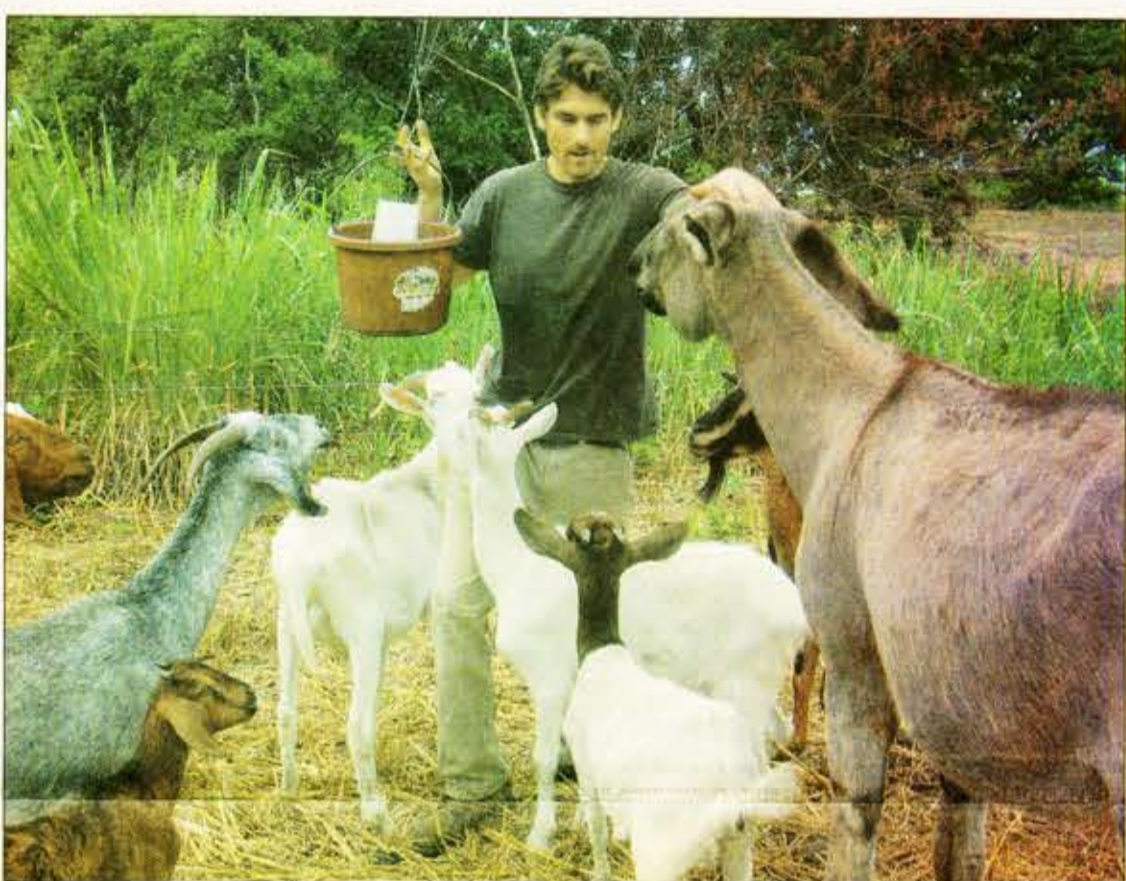
Goat grazing is a growing national trend. On the mainland, residential properties and public places, such as airports and schools, are bringing in herds of goats to clear overgrown landscape and attack weedy patches. Owners of waterfront properties have also turned to goats to prevent chemicals from entering the water.

Willcox liked the idea of hiring out goats for targeted grazing, particularly because the approach uses no chemicals and takes advantage of the animal's indiscriminate appetite. There's also a recycling of nutrients on the land as the animals process what they eat. He thinks this livestock-mower business fills a niche by tackling tough jobs that landscapers typically pass up and bulldozing companies consider too small.

Before navigating these uncharted entrepreneurial waters, Willcox did some research. He had no livestock experience prior to buying four goats from another friend, Rob Alexander of Holualoa Organic Farm, and starting Big Island Goat Dozers in June 2012.

Willcox said learning how to properly manage goats was challenging at times and there was much to laugh about, including "wrangling cantankerous escapees." The best part, he said, has been getting to know all the animals, all of whom are "characters" and each is named.

Willcox is grateful for the knowledge, assistance and encouragement he's received from Alexander, Pat King of Waikii Ranch, and Jeff Hanneken of Waimea-based Ranch Services LLC. Hanneken's father, Bob, used to own a goat



TOP: A goat from Big Island Goat Dozers grazes on some grass at a Kona property.

ABOVE: Big Island Goat Dozers owner E. Chris Willcox feeds Patron, the donkey, and his goats that are clearing a Kona property.

LEFT: Patron, the donkey, grazes on grass at a Kona property.

► SEE DOZERS PAGE 8A

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### ► DOZERS: Many clients bring their children to check out 'the cute new landscape workers'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7A

grazing business and gave Willcox lots of great advice.

His daydream version of self-employment became reality roughly two months ago, when he decided to finally quit his job and devote all of his time to his business, which has grown to 27 goats and a donkey. Willcox admits this was a vulnerable decision for him, but he's really dug in deep because it's a job he enjoys and believes in.

"I've invested my time, money and heart in this," he said. "I knew it was time for a change and decided to just go for it."

Leaving the steady comforts of that other job was scary, but Willcox said he's fueled by the overwhelming support he's received. Each job has led to another opportunity. Willcox is thankful for his parents, Jim and Joanne, who loaned him money for his business. Because of their contributions, he was able to purchase a better trailer for his herd.

Today, Willcox has even greater expansion plans, including eventually having 50 or 60 goats, operating two herds simultaneously at separate job sites, stretching his service area from Hamakua to South Kona to Milolii, and hiring an employee. He's also launching a website, [goatdozers.com](http://goatdozers.com).

Prior to putting his mighty munchers to work, Willcox surveys job sites, gives an estimate, offers a contract laying out the terms, and then puts up a temporary electric fence. The most ideal places are those with hard-to-reach heavy brush and bumpy, uneven ground. Basically, terrain that's tough for humans or motorized equipment, such as steep grade or land with rocks, he said. The goats are also great for sites with historical or special features, he added.

His herd includes Patron, the guard donkey, which has successfully warded off predators, such as feral dogs. The animals are tasked with the responsibility of chewing down typically an acre in a week. Depending on the location and terrain, Willcox charges

between \$800 and \$2,000 per acre. There's also a herd delivery and fence fee of \$300. He checks on his herd for an hour once or twice a day, constantly monitoring its progress and the animals' health. Once the herd has grazed, Willcox spends about an hour doing some extra cleanup of the area.

Depending on what's growing and what's happening on the property, repeated visits from the herd may be required to prevent regrowth, he added.

His clients, which include homeowners and real estate developers, like the herd for several reasons. The animals are an alternative to power tools and equipment so there's no guzzle of fuel or unwanted noise. Baby goats are big charmers. Grandchildren bring their children or grandchildren to check out "the temporary petting zoo" and "the cute new landscape workers." Onlookers can visit the herd, but must stay behind the fence, Willcox said.

For more information, call 315-1054 or email [goatdozer@gmail.com](mailto:goatdozer@gmail.com).