

# **Introduction to Ventura Brush Goats**

**Michael Leicht**  
**Ventura Brush Goats**  
**Owner/Operator**





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# Sheep help vintners make fine wine



**Kimberly Rivers**

*kimberly@ojaivalleynews.com*

**B**anjo, the 5-year-old border collie, worked hard to keep the sheep clustered together and moving forward as they crossed Maricopa Highway, heading to the Walson Holland vineyard on Cuyama Road, just after noon on Feb. 13.

The sheep, part of the Ventura Brush Goats herds, were being moved from a field near the corner of El Roblar Avenue and Maricopa Highway to the vineyard, where they'd remain for nearly three days to trim the grass to benefit the soil and, in turn, the grapes.

Michael Leicht, owner and shepherd with Ventura Brush Goats, said that sheep are used in cases like this, instead of goats. "Sheep do better in vineyards without causing damage because, unlike goats, sheep can't stand on their back legs."

Using the sheep is part of "closing the loop," said winemaker Benny Holland with

Walson Farms. He said the wine, sourced from the grapes grown on Cuyama, are sold primarily in Ojai under the Walson Holland label. Grapes being grown include Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre and Sauvignon Blanc. Most of the vines are about 12 years old.

"We don't have to use pesticides or herbicides," said Holland, because the grazing sheep "mitigate the overgrowth. Their feces are helpful for soil health." He said the feces are high in nitrogen, and contain beneficial "microflora" that is "great for the vines. It lowers our carbon footprint." They don't need to use mowers to keep the grass down.

Holland said because of the way the sheep graze, by cutting the grass and leaving the roots in the soil, even when the summer comes and the grass dies, the roots remain and add to soil health.

The sheep make two passes a year, said Holland, and the flock is likely to come back in March or April.



*Ojai Valley News photos by Kimberly Rivers*

**Top, a flock of sheep with Ventura Brush Goats heads east on Cuyama Road on Feb. 13 after crossing Maricopa Highway. Above, Banjo the border collie with Ventura Brush Goats works a flock of sheep through a field of blooming mustard toward Maricopa Highway on Feb. 13.**



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Questions?

Michael Leicht

[brushgoatquote@gmail.com](mailto:brushgoatquote@gmail.com)