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## Browsing Academy

# GOAT BREEDS

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There is a lot of information published on the different breeds of goats; books and internet sites. Therefore, I decided to select and discuss several of the more important and readily available meat, fibre and dairy goat breeds in the United States. For more information about specific breeds and detailed production data, I have compiled a resource(s) list. These more detailed and researched articles will help you in making a breed choice to match your environmental and nutritional constraints and target marketing goals.

An important criteria when selecting a goat breed is to identify producers utilizing goats under the same production management strategy as you are in the process of planning. It is advisable to visit the ranch/farm, talk with the producer and see the goats in action.

### *MEAT GOAT BREEDS*

#### **KIKO**

The breeding regime was developed by New Zealand breeders to take advantage of the feral doe base dynamics as a breeding and genetic improvement tool (population genetics). Feral does are small in stature with an amazing ability to survive adverse climatic conditions and demanding nutritional constraints without supplemental feeding. In crossbreeding with dairy breed bucks (AngloNubian, British Toggenburg and Saanen) that met the size and meat production criteria established by the breeders, milk production of the feral does was enhanced.

Goats produced under extreme environmental and vegetative constraints are naturally selected for soundness in conformation, structurally correct feet and legs, fertility, milk production (good udder and teat conformation) and temperament. Consequently, there are both polled and horned genetics in the Kiko breed as well as a range of coat colors with white being the most dominant. Initially, there was no set breed type since the 'breed', now known as the Kiko was selected solely for survivability and growth rate under commercially farmed hill country conditions.

With selections from the F2 and F3 generations, the liveweights of the kids increased; kid growth rate increased as did their ability to survive under New Zealand hill country pastoral conditions. The Kiko was then tested for performance under the conditions established for the breed.

The breeding flock was farmed on steep hill country and managed with minimal inputs such as internal parasite drenching. The does were expected to twin at first kidding and rear twins at subsequent kiddings. They were pressured by a higher stocking rate and culled ruthlessly. Five month liveweights of kids were used as an initial selection point (weaning at 4 months) as it is a measure of maternal ability. At eight months, liveweights were a good indication of the weanoffs' ability to obtain growth rate from vegetation on their own accord and at fifteen months, the liveweight was used to select replacement stock. By that point in time, the offspring had become environmentally adapted, they had survived and had a high growth rate – the major characteristic traits selected for the breed. Therefore, successful completion of the performance

tests under stressful conditions by four generations had evolved the new breed – the KIKO meat goat.

The Kiko does are selected for increased depth of heart girth, spring of rib, width across the withers and rump, length and width of back and loin and fullness of hindquarter (thigh). They carry their body weight on sturdy legs and solid feet. They have compact udders and milkability, twin and are good mothers with a pleasing disposition. Most import, they know how to browse.

The Kiko bucks are selected on many of the same rigid conformation standards as the females along with the shoulder and pelvic angles, expressed muscle definition of the hindquarter and inside hindleg and a pear shaped scrotum that is not split containing firm testicles of equal size.

### **SPANISH MEAT**

The brush goat (Spanish Meat) is unique to the US (specifically Texas) and used as a secondary ranching enterprise to cattle for brush control, weed management and cabrito. These goats are hardy, prolific, express adaptability toward various environmental and nutritional situations and can be managed under extensive production conditions. They are not generally uniform in appearance and meet few of the requirements of a breed. Spanish Meats come in a variety of colors, are horned, seasonally polyestrous (reproductive), and have an independent personality. Their main fault, or major weakness, is their slow growth rate from birth to weaning. Several breeders have added dairy blood to increase the size of the does and offspring and to increase milk production.

Because there are large numbers of Spanish Meat goats available, it is an excellent opportunity to use population genetics to increase size/scale, weight and muscling, meat production, carcass merit and twinning rate. They can be selected for structural correctness, ability to survive under unfavorable conditions and convert poor quality roughages to lean meat while maintaining a positive body condition score.

Spanish Meat bucks are selected for correct conformation, larger size and muscularity along with carcass value. The does are selected for multiple births, good conformation and muscling, larger size and their adaptability to accelerated kidding.

### **BOER**

The Improved Boer goat was imported into the United States in 1994 after years of quarantine in New Zealand and Australia for disease surveillance. These goats originated in South Africa (Eastern Cape in the district of Somerset East) and are a composite selected from the existing native breeds of goats and some European and Indian goat breeds to achieve functional production characteristics.

They were selected for rapid growth, enhanced reproductive performance, uniformity in conformation and their adaptability to environmental conditions. Distribution of the main Boer goat population in South Africa is spread in areas where brush is dense and encroaching the grasslands and where the mountainous topography is rough.

South African farming is based on production economics; utilizing the natural vegetative resources to attain the highest yield while improving the natural resources over the long term. The selection characteristics for the Boer goat are: meat and pelts of high quality, hardiness and adaptability to extensive and intensive production management, resistance to diseases, fertility and kidding percentage, abundance of milk, longevity and browsing habits. The farmers capitalized on farming goats and cattle simultaneously as they compliment each other and kilograms of meat produced per hectare can be maximized.

Meat produced by goats is a good source of food for lower income families and is the main source of income for the farmer. Therefore, the selection criteria for breeding stock are based upon meat production characteristics; heavy, deep and long carcass, ability to gain weight rapidly and legs of reasonable length. The Boer goat is being used in crossbreeding programs with Spanish Meats and the dairy breeds to produce meatier carcasses.

### **MYOTONIC**

The Myotonic breed has been referred to as the Tennessee Fainting goat, Texas Wooden Leg, Tennessee Meat goat, or Tennessee Stiffleg. This breed stiffens and falls down when scared or startled; a negative when selecting a browsing goat. They are less agile and not as aggressive browsers due to myotonia congenita. But, they do exhibit and have been selected for meat production characteristics, especially for their heavily muscled rump and hindquarters.

### ***FIBRE GOAT BREEDS***

#### **CASHMERE**

There is not a cashmere breed of goat per se, but goats that produce a specific type of downy undercoat that is light, warm and has a high insulating capacity. A cashmere undercoat is a definite advantage during adverse weather conditions while browsing. Selecting for fibre (increased down weight) and meat production simultaneously will result in reduced body weight, smaller carcasses, and reduces the overall selection progress for both traits.

Cashmere producing type goats have been kept by rural and nomadic farmers throughout the world for meat and milk. Recently, the fibre industry has been demanding more product with China (Inner Mongolia), Iran and Afghanistan, Russia, and Turkey increasing production from their mountainous regions and tablelands. New Zealand and Australia have been producers of consistently luxurious cashmere for decades.

Because fibre production is a highly inheritable trait, the many types of goats carrying 'down' have been upgraded to produce a lustrous, fine micron product. Therefore the body type of goat selected comes from various breeds in the countries producing the fibre. Besides cashmere production, they are used under strenuous environmental conditions to open brushlands and stabilize grass production on the plateaus. These goats must have body capacity, durability, survivability and the ability to travel long distances. They must maintain a good body condition score on low quality vegetation, produce offspring and shear a fine micro fibre.

In the US, cashmere type goats are being used for biological weed and brush control in Montana, North and South Dakota, Minnesota and Wyoming. They are used to reclaim lands that have been infested with leafy spurge, spotted knapweed, broom snakeweed, thistle, and bindweed.

### **ANGORA**

The Angora breed dates back over 2000 years in the area of Asia Minor (Turkey is located in this region). In 1849 the first Angoras were imported into the US. Their main concentration today is in Texas, California/Oregon and Arizona. They were selected and bred for their white fleece composed of long, soft, silky ringlets. Angoras, smaller in stature, have not necessarily been selected for meat production, reproductive efficiency or body weight.

Because the Angora produces a long fibre, using this breed of goat to eradicate dense stands of blackberries or other types of vegetation containing 'stickers' is a problem.

### **DAIRY GOAT BREEDS**

Dairy goats producers in the United States have been selecting for milk production characteristics since the early 1890's when Nubian-type goats were first imported. The various dairy breeds (Nubian, Alpine, LaMancha, Toggenburg, Oberhasli and Saanen) come from areas of the world ranging in vast geographic and environmental differences (from upper Egypt to Europe). As dairy goats, the females of the various breeds are selected for breed characteristics, strength, vigor and femininity. They should be symmetrical and balanced with neck, shoulderblades, back and rump well blended. A straight topline and well attached mammary system help in functioning as a high milk producing dairy animal.

When using dairy breed females in a crossbreeding program for meat production, begin managing the first generation kids as meat goats. They will rapidly learn to be aggressive browsers, athletic and bi-pedal and withstand more inclement weather than their dams. As breeding generations progress, their spacious productive udders will decrease in size and they will attain more muscle building capabilities.

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