
Chapter 2

Breeds of Meat Goats

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Many different breeds of meat goats are available for use in a commercial operation. Choosing which breed to raise depends upon terrain, resources, marketing opportunities and producer preferences. Before choosing a breed or combination of breeds, producers need to evaluate each of these factors.

The following is a description of the breeds of meat goats widely used in the U.S. Some breeds require certain characteristics to be registered with their respective breed associations. These characteristics are listed where relevant. Several other breeds are available throughout the world and even in the U.S., but they have not gained widespread use.

Spanish or Brush Goat

Spanish or brush goats, shown in Figure 2-1, came from Europe during the early exploration and colonization of North America. These goats either escaped from or were released by Coronado, DeSoto and other Spanish Explorers. Therefore, goats have existed in Oklahoma and Texas since the 1540s. Pockets of wild goats descended from these animals and roamed this area for about 400 years until goat production became profitable.

These feral goats became known as Spanish or brush goats. Many people think of this goat breed when discussing a goat enterprise. These goats have

no specific breed ancestry; they have developed through natural selection. The term Spanish also is used to describe any goat of unknown ancestry.

Since this goat breed has been developed from a wild background, its body type may be smaller than other breeds. The dominant trend in the wild was for smaller, more agile goats, and this breed thrives on rough terrain.

Essential for the wild, the does (females) have small udders making it easier for them to forage hilly or rough terrain. Cactus, thorns, rocks and other obstacles would damage large udders. Also because of its wild background, this breed is extremely hardy.

The Spanish goat tolerates extreme heat and cold and favors brush and weeds for forage. Some producers have referred to them as the Brahman cow of the goat world because they make excellent mothers. The does thrive and produce with little management. They may also be some of the most parasite-resistant goats available. Many Texans prefer to use them in a crossbreeding system with the Boer goat.

Body shape, ear shape, horns, hair and color are not consistent. This breed can be red, black, white, or any combination with short or long hair, horns or polled (no horns), or long or short ears. Size varies greatly due to climate, terrain and available breeding stock.



Figure 2-1. Spanish or Brush goat.

Boer Goat

The Boer goat was developed in South Africa. It is a cross between native African goats and European, Angora and Indian goat breeds. The name is derived from the Dutch word meaning farmer. The first Boer goat registration was started in 1959 in South Africa. The Boer goat was imported in limited numbers into the U.S. during the 1970s, but more heavily beginning in 1993.

The Boer goat is primarily a meat goat. It is a horned breed with lop ears and shows a variety of color patterns although they are generally recognized for their red head and white body, such as



Figure 2-2. Boer goat.

the one shown in Figure 2-2. The Boer can be used very effectively in combination with cattle due to its browsing ability and limited impact on the grass. Boers can produce kidding rates of 200 percent with weaning rates of 160 percent. They are low maintenance and have sufficient milk to rear a kid for early maturing. Puberty is reached in about six months for bucks and 10 to 12 months for does. An adult Boer buck weighs between 240 and 300 pounds and an adult doe weighs between 200 and 225 pounds. They are capable of an ADG (average daily gain) of more than 0.44 pound per day, but 0.3 to 0.4 pound per day is more standard. The Boer goat also has an extended breeding season, making it possible to produce three kid crops every two years.

Kiko Goat

Developed by the Goatex Group, LLC in New Zealand, the Kiko goat is shown in Figure 2-3. They were developed from the most substantial and fertile native goats in a breeding program where population dynamics were rigorously applied to produce a goat with enhanced meat production ability with browse conditions. Selected feral does were crossbred with Nubian, Toggenburg and Saanen bucks, with further cross-breeding in the second



Figure 2-3. Kiko goats.

and third generations. The breed was established in 1986. Kiko is the Maori word for flesh or meat. Kiko goats remained in New Zealand until they were imported into the U.S. in the early 1990s.

Kikos are known for their hardiness and ability to achieve substantial weight gains with natural conditions and without supplementary feeding. The Kiko goat is large framed, early maturing and comes in every color. Most North American Kikos are white, since mostly white goats were imported and white is the dominant gene. Many Kikos carry genes for color and colored Kikos can be registered. The hair coats of Kikos will range from slick in summer to flowing hair when in wintry mountain country.

They are not as heavily boned as some breeds but have exceptional conversion rates. Therefore, cutability (ratio of lean meat to fat in the carcass) is expected to be high.

The Kiko is a consummate browser and will range extensively when run in open country. They are not affected by substantial climatic variation and are equally at home in sub-alpine mountain country and arid brush land. The does are ample, feminine and generally have good udder placement and attachment. They are capable of conceiving, carrying, giving birth to and rearing multiple offspring without intervention under less than ideal conditions. The males display substantial characteristic horns.

Kiko kids are born of average size but with considerable vigor, and they are known for their growth rate after birth with little to no input. Growth rate is a defining characteristic of the Kiko goats, which display a rate of growth at least equal to any other meat goat breed.

In New Zealand, the Kiko has been called the go anywhere, eat anything goat because of its ability to thrive under less-than-ideal conditions. Since the

Kiko was developed in New Zealand, which has a temperate climate much like that of the southeastern U.S., this breed is an ideal livestock for the eastern half of the nation.

Myotonic Goat

Myotonic goats, also called Tennessee Fainting goats, Wooden Leg goats or Stiff Leg goats, are one of the few goats indigenous to the U.S. Some Texas ranchers have renamed them Tennessee Meat Goats. This goat has two strains and most of them are found in Tennessee and the eastern U.S.

Myotonic means that when the goats are frightened or excited they lock up and often fall over (faint) and lie very stiff for a few seconds. This description is an over-simplification, but the chemicals, which are rushed to humans' muscles and joints to prepare them for fight or flight are withheld in the Myotonic goat under exciting or frightful circumstances.

No one really knows their origins. One of the possibilities is that a private herd sold to a Tennessee farmer around 1880 was the beginning of the breed. A man named John Tinsley arrived in Marshall County, Tenn., with four goats, a buck and three does, which he had brought from Nova Scotia. When he moved on a year later, he left his goats behind. All the fainting goats in the U.S. can probably trace their origins back to these four.

Myotonic goats that have been selected for meat production are heavily rumped, deep-chested animals. Most are black and white, such as the one shown in Figure 2-4, but multiple colors are not uncommon.



Figure 2-4. Myotonic or Tennessee Fainting goat.

They breed year-round, are easy kidders and have good milk production. Many breeders have noted the breed has the capability to produce two kiddings per year. They are good mothers, and in most cases a bonding pen is not needed. Since they are not good climbers and jumpers, they are somewhat easier to keep than other goats.

The American Livestock Breed Conservancy has placed this breed of goat on their rare list, with an estimated world population of less than 10,000. They have now been discovered as excellent cross-breed stock for the Boer goat. The fainting gene is recessive; therefore, it is usually not expressed in crossbred animals.

Virginia State University has revealed a meat-to-bone ratio of 4:1, which is significantly higher than other breeds. Prairie View A&M showed a 6 percent to 10 percent greater meat yield achieved by using a Myotonic buck on other breed does. Virginia State and Virginia Tech have revealed these durable, self-sufficient pasture animals to be more parasite resistant than other breeds.

Savanna Goat

The Savanna goat was developed in the 1950s from native goats of Southern Africa on the rugged harsh bush country where temperatures and rainfall can vary greatly. This breed was developed to thrive in a minimum-care, Savannah environment. The results are a goat that is fertile, heat- and pest-tolerant and drought resistant with good meat quality. They are year-round breeders. A breed registry was established in 1993.

The goats typically are all white, like the two shown in Figure 2-5, with lop ears similar to a Nubian. They have a thick pliable totally black-pigmented skin and a short smooth coat. They resemble the Boer breed, but are more compact with shorter legs. The does have a good mothering ability and bond well with their young. The Savanna goats are also efficient foragers and survive with minimal input. They adapt to a variety of unpleasant climates like sun, cold and rain. They have a natural resistance against tick-borne diseases such as heartwater and against other external parasites.

Pygmy or Cameroon Dwarf Goat

The Pygmy goat originally was called the Cameroon Dwarf goat. This goat is mostly restrict-



Figure 2-5. Savanna goats.

ed to West Africa. Similar forms of Pygmy goats also occur in northern, southwestern and east Africa. However, what is called the Cameroon Dwarf goat is the one used in the U.S. It is the breed that came from the former French Cameroon area.

The Cameroon Dwarf goat, shown in Figure 2-6, has a full coat of straight, medium-long hair that varies in density with seasons and climates. On females, beards may be non-existent, sparse or trimmed. On adult males, abundant hair growth is desirable; the beard should be full, long and flowing with the copious mane draping cape-like across the shoulders.

All body colors are acceptable. The predominate coloration is a grizzled (agouti) pattern produced by the intermingling of light and dark hairs of any color.

For a Pygmy goat to be registered, the goat must have breed-specific markings. These markings include the muzzle, forehead, eyes and ears being accented in tones lighter than the dark portion of the body in goats of all colors, except goats that are solid black. Front and rear hoofs and cannons are darker than the main body coat, as are the crown, dorsal stripe and martingale; again except in goats that are solid black. On all caramel goats, light vertical stripes on front sides of darker socks are required.

Although not usually considered a meat goat, the Pygmy goat has been used in crossbreeding programs with other meat goat breeds to reduce the carcass size and fat content.



Figure 2-6. Pygmy or Cameroon Dwarf goat.

Nubian Goat

The Anglo-Nubian or Nubian goat, shown in Figure 2-7, is an all-purpose goat, useful for meat, milk and hide production. The Nubian is a relatively large and graceful goat. It was named for Nubia in northeastern Africa. The original goats imported from Africa, Arabia and India were long-legged, hardy goats that had some characteristics desired by goat breeders in England. English breeders crossed these imported bucks with the common short-haired does of England to develop the Nubian goat prior to 1895.

The Nubian breed is regarded as having an aristocratic appearance. The Anglo-Nubian carries a decidedly Roman nose and is always short-haired. The head is the distinctive breed characteristic, with the facial profile between the eyes and the muzzle



Figure 2-7. Nubian goat.

being strongly convex. The ears are long (extending at least 1 inch beyond the muzzle when held flat along the face), wide and pendulous. They lie close to the head at the temple and flare slightly out and well forward at the rounded tip, forming a bell shape. The ears are not thick, and the cartilage is well defined.

The hair is short, fine and glossy. Any color or colors, solid or patterned is acceptable. Black, red or tan are the most common colors, any of which may be carried in combination with white. Usually Anglo-Nubian males have shorter hair, particularly along the back and on the thigh.

Summary

Although these are not all of the meat goat breeds available, these breeds are the most numerous in the U.S. Some groups are trying to develop new cross-breeds of meat goats such as the TexMaster (a cross between Myotonic goats or Tennessee Meat goats and Boer goats), Genemaster (3/8 Kiko x 5/8 Boer), and Sako (a cross between Savanna and Kiko).

There is no such thing as a single best breed to use in meat goat operation, as there is more variation among individuals within a given breed than there is on average between different breeds.

Many more crossbred cattle and swine exist in the U.S. than all of their purebreds combined. Perhaps a useful message can be found in these statistics for goat people.

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