

Arkansas Sheep and Goat News

Newsletter for the Arkansas Sheep and Goat Industry

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Buying a Meat Goat

*Dr. E. A. B. Oltenacu, Revised April 1999 by Dr. Tatiana Stanton
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York*

So you've decided to buy a meat goat wether. OK – let's start looking. First, if at all possible, find someone who knows a lot about goats to go "shopping" with you. This way they can help you avoid goats with serious problems and find a goat that meets your needs. They will also have a better idea of what a fair or realistic price is for specific goats.

Do not buy your 4-H project goat at an auction. It is much better to buy it direct from the person who raised it. This way you can find out useful information about what shots it has had, feed it is used to and how meaty its relatives look. If you do not have a 4-H leader with goat experience to guide you, try to buy your goat from someone local who is willing to give you advice if you run into problems with your goat. A local goat club is a good place to find out about goat raisers who are helpful and have good quality goats for sale. Your local Cooperative Extension office or the local Meat Goat Producers' Association can also give you information about local meat goat breeders.

Market wethers can come from almost any breed. But you will probably get a meatier kid if it is part South African Boer goat. It makes sense to

start out with a healthy, sound (sound means free of structural defects) goat kid that appears to have a good meat carcass. You should usually buy a market wether shortly after weaning unless you raised him yourself from one of your own does.

You can also start with a two-week-old kid that you will need to bottle-feed at least twice daily, but this will take both a lot of work and a lot of milk. Bottle-fed kids are generally less meaty than kids raised on their dams, and they are also easy to get very attached to. Don't make this choice unless you and your family have discussed and planned it out carefully and have experience caring for very young animals. Always keep in mind that this is a market kid, and you are raising it to slaughter for goat meat.

Try to avoid buying an animal when it is undergoing a lot of stress. For example, if possible, get a weaned kid a week after weaning rather than right at weaning. If you must buy the kid exactly at weaning, be sure to find out what hay and/or creep feed it is already eating and buy a small amount of this feed from the seller to feed it at home the first few days while you gradually switch it to your own feed.

Ask that it be given a Clostridium C and D shot within two to four weeks before weaning to protect it against enterotoxemia (overeating disease). If the kid has not been castrated yet, remember that you will have to get it castrated yourself in order to show it in most 4-H shows. Make sure the kid has been disbudded or was born naturally polled (hornless) if your local 4-H shows do not allow horned goats. Otherwise, plan on “tipping” the points of the horn by removing the tips with a hacksaw or hoof nippers at least a month before showing him. Goats are very sociable, so it is a good idea to buy two goats rather than just one.

Ideally, the wether you are buying should look long in the loin (at least 6 inches long if 10 weeks old) when viewed from the side and very wide between his legs when viewed from the front and rear. You want its escutcheon to be low and wide. Unless he is only a few weeks old, you would like to see some muscle development on his thighs and forearms. He should have a shiny, glossy coat and look a little plump if he is still nursing from the dam. His withers should be rounded rather than sharp, and he should be relatively level along the topline. Count on him growing about 2 to 3 pounds per week or about 10 to 15 pounds per month from weaning to slaughter age. For example, if you buy a kid who is 40 pounds at 12 weeks of age in late May and your 4-H show is in late August, your kid will likely weigh at least 70 pounds at show time.

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you try to choose a wether to buy:

- Do his eyes look dull or cloudy? Yes No
- Does he have diarrhea? Yes No
- Is he standing hunched up with his tail drooping down? Yes No
- Are his eyes or nose very runny? Yes No
- Is he coughing or breathing hard without having just done hard exercise? Yes No
- Is his coat rough and flaky or does he have any bald spots? Yes No
- Are his gums and insides of his eyelids very pale? Yes No
- Does he have any unusual lumps or swellings on his body or legs? Yes No

- Is he lame or stiff moving? Yes No
- Does he have a fever? Yes No
- Is his appetite poor? Yes No
- Does he seem depressed or weak and uninterested in his surroundings? Yes No
- Is he having trouble urinating? Yes No

A “yes” answer to any of these questions often indicates a sick goat. So check carefully with the owner if you feel any of these health problems exist. Here are some more questions to ask yourself to check how structurally sound the goat is you’ve selected to buy.

- Are his back knees (hocks) extremely straight so that when viewed from the side he looks as if his back legs are fence posts? This is called “posty-legged.”
- Are his ankles (pasterns) weak and long so that his dewclaws almost rest on the ground?
- Are his front knees and pasterns crooked (toe in or out) when viewed from the front?
- Are his hocks and pasterns crooked (toe in or out) when viewed from the rear?
- When you open his mouth, are the teeth on his lower jaw way in front of (overshot, monkey jawed) or behind (undershot or parrot mouthed) the dental pad of his upper jaw?
- Do the toes of his hooves spread far apart from each other when he walks?

Hopefully, you answered “no” to all these questions.

If you are buying a meat goat doe or doe kid for breeding purposes, you will also want her to have a healthy udder. It should not be double teated nor should it hang so low that it can be injured easily or is hard for newborn kids to nurse from. You generally want her to show less dairy character when not milking than a dairy doe would. Her withers will often be rounder and her escutcheon lower than on a dairy doe. If she has kidded before, make sure she was a good mother and that her kids grew well while nursing from her, indicating that she had plenty of milk for them.

Source: New York State 4-H Meat Goat Project, Fact Sheet #3.

Compare the Health Benefits of Goat's Milk Versus Cow's Milk

Posted February 6, 2007, for Associated Content by Angela Harris

Although Americans are accustomed to cow's milk, goat's milk is much more common in most other parts of the world. Goats are hardier than cows, are inexpensive and take up less space.

Goat's milk is closer to mother's milk than any other food. Goat's milk is a complete protein and contains every essential amino acid. Yet it contains significantly less fat than cow's milk.

Goat's milk is easy to digest, even for babies. Goat's milk has more medium chain fatty acids than cow's milk, which aids in easier digestion. Goat's milk fat consists of 35 percent medium chain fatty acids, compared with 17 percent found in cow's milk. Almost half of people who are lactose intolerant are able to drink goat's milk.

Three different medium chain fatty acids found in goat's milk are thought to have health benefits for people with certain types of diseases, especially diseases involving metabolism. Some of these conditions include cystic fibrosis, gallstones, heart disease and various digestive problems. Goat's milk has three times more of these types of medium chain fatty acids than cow's milk.

Source: http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/136851/compare_the_health_benefits_of_goat.html?cat=5

Goat's milk contains less of the enzyme xanthine oxidase than cow's milk. When this enzyme enters the bloodstream, it can create scar tissue on the heart. This, in turn, causes the body to produce cholesterol for protection. This can be a precursor to arteriosclerosis.

Goat's milk contains more vitamin A than cow's milk. Cow's milk vitamin A partially consists of carotenoids, which must be turned into vitamin A by the body. All of the vitamin A found in goat's milk is preformed. This is an advantage to people with health conditions that prevent their bodies from being able to form vitamin A from carotenoids. Goat's milk also contains more riboflavin than cow's milk.

A cup of goat's milk has almost 33 percent of the recommended daily allowance for calcium, compared to almost 30 percent of the recommended daily allowance for calcium in a cup of cow's milk.

A cup of goat's milk also supplies more protein than a cup of cow's milk, almost nine grams of protein compared to about eight grams of protein in cow's milk.

Feeding Your Guard Dog

Perhaps one of the most common issues that people with livestock guard dogs (LGDs) have questions about is feeding their dog. Here we'll address the question of delivering the food to your dogs rather than your goats. Some LGDs will protect their food from all comers, while others are real wimps and stand back while even young goats gorge on delicious, high-dollar food.

For those worried about the goats, our advice is, don't be. If the goats clean up the dog food, the only real victims will be you and your budget, because dog food sure ain't hay and you'll keep replacing it until your dog actually gets to eat. If the dog protects its food, it may sound like your dog is going to kill something. But, if you'll watch without panic, you'll see that there is a lot of threat noise and posturing but no grabbing or biting. (At least there had better not be, or you have some heavy retraining in your future!)

Especially if you have multiple LGDs, the most efficient answer we've found to feed working LGDs is to use self-feeders. This will keep you from being locked into a specific time to feed the dogs. It also means there is always free-choice food available to the dogs so they're never stacked up at the gate waiting to be fed just as the goats decide to go back out to forage. We have never had to hold food back from any of our working dogs because they were eating too much, and they seem to stay quite healthy choosing when and how much to eat without our interference. In addition, alpha and dominance issues in regards to food can be resolved according to the dogs' schedule, not yours. It seems to be somewhat less violent that way.

Self-feeders are easy to locate. Usually everyone from the local feed store to the local pet store will have some variation of the self-feeder for dogs. We find that the size that holds about 50 pounds works well for us, but if you have a single dog, you might

want to try one a bit smaller. You'll need one that will hold enough food to feed your dog for as long as possible without the food molding in the feeder. The quantity your dog eats daily, the humidity and the insect activity in your area are the major issues affecting the amount of food you can effectively store in the feeder and still provide quality food for your dog. If you can find someone who manufactures or assembles the actual feeders, you may save a good deal of money buying seconds. These feeders can be classed as seconds for a marred finish on the metal or other similar inconsequential irregularities. We bought ours several years ago for about half the price we would have paid in a retail store. If you have chickens, you'll need to raise the feeder by placing a milk crate or similar item under it to prevent the chickens from getting the leverage they need to open the door and eat if they manage to find the feeder.

Simply using a self-feeder is not, unfortunately, the complete answer. If your goats like dog food, a little thing like a gravity-activated swinging door won't stop them. They'll have it figured out as fast as your dogs do (if not a little faster). The dogs aren't as greedy about their feed as the goats are. You'll have to allow your dogs access to the feeder while denying access to the goats. Although it sounds difficult to imagine such a thing, the method is quite simple: surround the feeder with a sturdy fence, cut a hole in the fence too high and too small for a goat to jump through but placed just right for your dog. Presto! You have a goat-proof dog feeder.

We have placed hog panel, cattle panel and utility panel (but a wooden fence or any barrier too high for goats would work) around the feeder and cut a hole in the panel about 14 inches off the ground, with the hole being 9 inches to 1 foot square. The dogs can get through the hole to get to the feeder and the goats can't. Make sure any sharp edges or points are smoothed off to protect the dogs when they go

Source: Adapted from *Livestock Guarding Dogs* by Dan and Paula Lane, Bountiful Farm, Shady Point, Oklahoma, Unit in Goat Training, Langston University, Langston, Oklahoma.

through because it is a tight fit. Variations of this method include making a hole for the dogs to crawl under or teaching them to jump in over the top. We don't use these variations because we feel it teaches and encourages the dogs to use skills helpful in circumventing our fencing.

To teach the dogs to use the feeders, put them in the pen, show them the food and lock them in. They can almost always figure out how to get out. You do need to check though; we've had some rescue dogs that would have stayed in there forever if they weren't released. You may have to do this two or three times before they catch on.

On occasion, you'll find that a goat or two will figure out how to get in to a specific feeder. In that case, you'll have four choices:

1. Reconfigure the feeder fence with a different height from ground and a smaller hole.
2. Sell the goat or otherwise physically remove it from the pen where the feeder is located.
3. Feed the dogs individually.
4. Resign yourself to feed that goat dog food.

We have never found a way to un-train the goat from getting into the feeder without either making changes in the way it's built or making it just as unusable for dogs as it becomes for goats (i.e., electric fence to keep animals away is just too inclusive!). The goat will learn easily that it is a "bad thing" to be in the feeder but that just means they run when they see you coming.

With a little patience because the really determined goats will provide excellent quality control data, you'll have a goat-proof dog food delivery system that will provide your LGDs with quality food on a continuing basis.

USDA to Launch First National Goat Study

In July and August 2009, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will contact randomly selected goat producers in 21 states to participate in the first national study of priority health and health-management issues facing the U.S. goat industry.

Two USDA agencies – the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the National Agricultural Statistics Service – will conduct the study,

which will focus on the health, productivity and management practices of the meat, dairy and fiber goat industries. USDA will collect data from producers representing 78.4 percent of U.S. goat operations and 85.3 percent of U.S. goats.

APHIS' National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS), which designed the study and will analyze the data, worked with industry representatives,

academia, veterinary representatives and other stakeholders to ensure that the study addresses the industry's priority health issues. The Goat 2009 study has the following major objectives:

- Determine producer awareness of veterinary services program diseases and describe management and biosecurity practices important for the control of infectious diseases – including brucellosis, scrapie, caprine arthritis-encephalitis, Johne's disease and caseous lymphadenitis;
- Establish a baseline description of animal health, nutrition and management practices in the U.S. goat industry;
- Estimate the prevalence of Johne's disease infection, internal parasitism and anthelmintic resistance;

- Characterize contagious ecthyma (sore mouth) in U.S. goats. Determine producer awareness of the zoonotic potential and practices to prevent sore mouth transmission, and assess producer interest in an improved vaccine for sore mouth;
- Examine factors (e.g., genetic and management) that correlate with caprine arthritis and encephalitis virus levels; and
- Provide genetic and serological banks for future research.

Participation in USDA's Goat 2009 study is voluntary and confidential. Results will be presented on regional and national bases; data provided by individual participants will remain confidential and cannot be identified. Links between NAHMS data and participating operations are confidential.

Final Rule on Interstate Movement of Sheep and Goats Published

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is amending the regulations regarding the interstate movement of animals to add sheep and goats to the approved live-stock facility agreement.

Livestock facilities that handle sheep and goats in interstate commerce must meet the requirements for approval including complying with this agreement to utilize certain provisions in the scrapie regulations that reduce the movement requirements for sheep and goats moving to or from these establishments. Such facilities include stockyards, livestock markets, buying stations, concentration points or any other premises where sheep and goats in interstate commerce are assembled and which choose to become an approved livestock facility.

The approval by APHIS will be contingent on the facility operator meeting certain minimum standards and other conditions related to the receipt, handling and release of sheep and goats at the facility, as well as complying with certain animal identification and record keeping requirements.

These standards and other conditions will serve, in part, to support the regulations relating to the interstate movement of sheep and goats in order to control the spread of scrapie.

APHIS responded to all of the comments received from industry organizations and markets. Therefore, the final rule was effective May 1, 2009.

The Federal Register posting is available at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/E9-7233.htm>.

FSA Offers Livestock Indemnity Program

Have you had livestock losses from the recent storms? The loss of sheep and goats of all types and weight ranges due to adverse weather conditions is eligible for compensation through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP).

According to officials with FSA, producers must contact their local FSA office within 30 days of when the loss is apparent to be eligible for LIP benefits.

Proof of death must be provided and documentation including the quantity, kind, type and weight range of the livestock is required.

Payments are based on 75 percent of a fair market value as determined by the secretary of agriculture.

The LIP payments were established in the 2008 Farm Bill and are intended to compensate producers

for livestock death losses in excess of normal mortality due to adverse weather conditions. Although the forms and the procedures to apply for the program are not yet available, it is still imperative that producers contact their local FSA office within 30 days of the loss to be eligible for the benefit.

“Even though there are no program regulations yet, this at least gives producers an explanation of what to do if a storm causes livestock losses,” commented Peter Orwick, executive director for the

American Sheep Industry Association. “Several storms this winter and spring have caused severe losses for sheep producers, and this program was supported by ASI in the Farm Bill to help these farms and ranches recover. Unfortunately, many new and re-authorized programs still need the rules to be published for implementation and payments, so it is important that producers visit with their congressional delegation to have them remind USDA that rules need immediate attention.”

Upcoming Event

July 15-18 – Goat Camp, Harrison

July 15 Evening – Sign In

July 16 a.m. – Meat Goat (Breeding) Fitting and Showmanship

July 16 p.m. – Dairy Goat Fitting and Showmanship

July 17 – Market Goat Management and Showmanship

July 18 a.m. – Goat Show

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Jodie A. Pennington, Professor - Dairy and Goats