



AKGA PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

A M E R I C A N K I K O G O A T A S S O C I A T I O N ®

The Process of Selecting Commercial Stock for a Meat Goat Operation

As with most business propositions, time and energy spent at the beginning stages of the start-up can dictate the success or failure of the enterprise. Understanding your proposed market place and the inputs required to produce your meat goats is critical. In livestock businesses the interaction between your specific environment (and its geographic features) with the livestock will dictate many of your management decisions and input costs. It will also significantly affect your potential sales costs and transport costs. So from a selection point of view, envi-

ronmentally adapted genetics from environmentally adapted livestock are critical to your success.

“I thought this was all about selection of commercial goats,” I hear you saying to yourself. Well, yes, it is indeed. Your selection of viable commercial stock should be based on the inputs, costs and available marketing opportunities as mentioned if the intention is to maximize your profits and minimize costs. To select stock and then try to construct conditions around them that enables them to thrive can be a very

costly way to produce livestock. Ideally, your most readily available environment and least expensive (but adequate) inputs should be used. Using goats or other livestock that require the least inputs sets you up with a head start.

Know Your Market

If you intend to produce goats for profit, but not necessarily for their actual meat, (such as pets or show stock) with a higher profit margin than plain meat goats, you are producing goats in a market with more tolerance of higher input costs. In these cases, the high profit margin allows input costs to creep up and the enterprise to still remain profitable. Some show and pet livestock require high levels of inputs to survive and thrive. However, in strictly meat-goat markets, very high profit margins do not

exist. Market competition drives prices down maximally. That is the free-market way. Meat-goat buyers and processors pay the least possible so they maximize their profits. If some meat goat producers produce at a loss, as far as the buyers are concerned, “too bad”.

So before you set out to select your commercial meat goats, you have studied your current farm or ranch conditions and made a realistic estimate of your likely annual

doe-upkeep costs. You have studied the prices paid for the different weights and types of meat-goats, which are in demand at your local livestock sales venues. After the math has been done, you have decided to proceed in pursuit of the projected profit you anticipate on your investment. As part of the set-up or expansion into meat goats, there has been money set aside to buy the foundation stock for your meat goat operation. Now things start to get real in a hurry!!

Invest Wisely

If you've done all your homework, you will likely have been developing impressions of the different meat goat breeds. You will have been considering if they would thrive in the conditions you expect to produce under, with the levels of inputs you expect to provide. Hopefully you can develop realistic expectations by talking to multiple established breeders (who are preferably not trying to sell you their goats at the same time). Be sure not to buy the first breed that meat-goat buyers in your area propose. Remember, buyers don't care about your profitability or your time. They want the highest quality product at the least expensive price to them. If you sustain large losses producing the type of goat a buyer wants – again, “too bad.” Your productivity, (the number of kids produced per exposed doe minus death loss to weaning), are of zero concern to him. However, buyers can be useful sources of information on the type of goats that they want. You may have heard that, “they are all the same color on the rail,” but the conformation and finish of the goats will show on the rail. Buyers see that and if the goat is the right type, in the right weight class, and in the right body condition, you will receive the price that the market dictates is appropriate. That right goat can be produced from many different breeds but some are produced a lot less profitably than others in certain environments. The goats presented for sale with less than the full set of desired carcass traits will be discounted accordingly. You should also ask when do the buyers want them? Where do they want them? How much have those types of goats been commanding in the market? The meat goat market is far more complex than the beef market and is more similar to the sheep market.

Now you are really ready to buy a trailer load of goats! But you've seen the prices replacement female goats are bringing. You know you can do better and get some cheap goats and save some money and start making a profit before you even start selling!! “Slow down,” is what I say, (only after learning such hard lessons myself)!

Not all commercial goats are created equally. University research over the past fifteen years has shown that there are only two breeds of goats that make suitable does/nannies for viable commercial meat goat production in the humid regions of the USA at this time. These are the Kiko meat goat and the “Spanish” (American) goats. The other major breeds have all been tested along side of these does. No others have been able to compete in terms of productivity in that environment. The Tennessee State University research seems to be supported by results from central performance tests conducted in the humid Mid Atlantic region at the Western Maryland University Forage based test. Anecdotally, the South African breeds do well in dry and arid regions but currently there is no independent research to support that contention. The South African breeds doing well in dry environments, similar to the original environment in which they were developed, would be logical.

In the research mentioned from Tennessee State University that Dr. Browning has conducted, the Kiko doe edges out the Spanish doe in total productivity. The use of “terminal” sire breeds on the Spanish does significantly improved some carcass traits but use of terminal-type does themselves to produce kids reduced productivity to unacceptably low levels. Survivability of both the does and kids produced by “Terminal” sire type breeds was also unacceptably low. The research showed that environmentally adapted Kiko and Spanish does are the most productive does in that humid environment. The Spanish does produced better growth rates and types of kids when a terminal sire was used, rather than full Spanish kids. The Kiko doe produced marginally higher growth rates when a terminal sire was used but survivability rates declined unacceptably and using Kiko sires on the Kiko does was the best option as replacement females could be kept and growth rates were minimally reduced relative to the terminal F1 cross, while survivability increased significantly and consequently productivity was increased per doe.

Anecdotally, some Spanish does originating in the southern United States have a harder time adapting to colder and wet climates. Once adapted, the adapted Spanish genetics seem to do well. The Kiko doe sheds out her winter coat to thrive in hot conditions but develops the heavy winter coat in colder climates. The Kiko doe is usually larger and more capable of producing kids with high growth rates due to generally being larger and heavier milkers. Temperamentally, the Kiko is generally calmer due to more selection for more docility. First-time

goat buyers should educate themselves about good goat conformation. Knowing points of conformation helps to develop an eye for functional soundness. Herd health should be carefully considered when making a purchase and a vet health-check can be a good investment prior to purchasing.

Summary

To summarize, developing a good clear plan based on the local production environment available to you and realistic market projections will help narrow down choices when you are ready to select commercial stock. Tapping into the experience of established breeders in your area that are large scale and profitable will help you make clear-eyed decisions. Selecting environmentally adapted and healthy stock from well established herds should lead to less herd establishment surprises. Learning about goat management and maintenance, in a profit conscious and sustainable way will help to maximize profits. Good luck in selecting commercial stock that will put you into the black in the meat goat business.

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