

Judging Market Goats in Tennessee

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When we start talking about judging market or meat goats, the first thing I hear is “I don’t know nothing about judging no goat. They ain’t none in my area and that is stupid wanting us to judge goats.” Well folks, I am here to tell you that there are goats in every county in Tennessee that have cattle. They are here and here to stay. To be able to be a successful judge of goats, you must first realize that these are **Meat Animals!!** Just like a steer, market hog or market lamb. You judge goats like any other meat animal. Meat is muscle and just like a steer, you look for the heaviest muscled, most structurally correct animal and they place first. Now granted, the structure of a goat is somewhat different from a lamb or hog, but the basic concept is the same. There are four areas of evaluation that you must consider when judging any animal including goats. The areas are: Structural Correctness, Muscularity, Volume and Capacity and finally Style and Balance. These will be covered in that order and I feel that this is the order that anyone who is judging goats must use to correctly evaluate market goats.

When we talk about structural correctness, this refers to the skeletal system or bone structure of the animal. You should always consider that the eyes and ears are functional unless you are instructed differently. Also, many goats, especially those that are Boer or Boer cross have problems with their teeth not touching the dental pad when their mouths are closed. This too is to be considered within accepted guidelines unless instructed differently. This may not be true when judging breeding animals. Market goats, when viewed from the side should have a strong, level top. The rump should also be long and have a slight slope from hooks to pins. It should have a high tail set and a square rump. Legs should be on the corners of the body and be strong. The goat should move around fluidly. Pasterns should be strong and have enough flex to allow the goat to move freely. Pasterns can be too long or weak, or too straight for the animal to move freely. Cow-hocked or sickle-hocked goats should be placed down as goats need to travel long distances for food. The ideal market goat should hold its head erect and the neck should extend out of the top of the shoulders.

Muscling in goats is somewhat similar to other meat animals. When I look for muscling in a goat, the first place I look is the width between the legs. This is especially true when goats are observed on the move. The width between the rear legs should be observed as well as the width of the leg itself. The widest part of the leg should be in the stifle area. One should also look at the length of the muscle of the leg when evaluating the amount of muscle in the leg. Another method of evaluating the muscle mass of a goat is to look at the forearm of the animal. This area is rarely covered in fat and can give you a real indication of the amount of true muscle that the animal has. Usually, a goat that has a big forearm with lots of muscle shape will be a heavily muscled animal. I have mentioned nothing about the top. It is somewhat difficult to visually assess the amount of muscle that a goat has in its top without much practice. Many times

we confuse a heavily muscled top with one that has a lot of bloom on it. If you are able to handle the goat, then you can easily tell the difference. At many contests, you will be unable to handle the goats, so you must use the other methods of evaluating the muscle in a goat. If you do handle the goat, I prefer to handle the rack as opposed to the loin. When you grab the rack area (right behind the shoulders) and you find anything other than the spine, the animal has muscle. When you feel something that feels like a roll of coins on either side of the spine, that is the muscle. The larger the diameter of the roll of coins, the more muscle. As a general rule, if a goat has a thick leg, it will have a big top in it. This is not always true on other species of market animals; but if a goat walks wide behind and it is thick in the stifle, then it will usually have a full loin and be shapely in the rack. Occasionally, you will find a young goat that will have too much muscle. These are usually fairly coarse in their makeup and will move around somewhat like a “chuffed” duck. These goats will grow out to be a short, thick “pumpkins” and should be moved to the lower end of the class. I have not mentioned fat in these goats. A goat will store fat internally before it will start putting fat on the outside of its body. The only thing that will place below a fat goat should be one that is simply “a bag of bones”.

When you look for volume and capacity in a goat, this refers to relationship between the length of body and the depth and width of the goat’s body. Length of body with a nearly level back, adequate width of the chest floor is critical for a market goat. When looking at a market goat from the side, the hind saddle should be as long, if not longer than the front saddle. The higher the amount of hind saddle in a goat, the higher it should place. High quality goats will be extremely wide chested and that is an indication that the goat is wider based and has more natural width of skeleton. I am not talking about a coarse fronted goat, but one that has neat, smooth shoulders and that possess wide chest floor. Look for goats that are uniformly deep bodied with tremendous curvature and openness to their rib cage. These are the type of goats that should place higher in the class.

When you are looking for style and balance in a market goat, the best way for me to describe it is that all body parts blend together in a pleasing package. Probably the best way that I have ever heard it put was that a quality goat “has the body of a pig with the shoulders and neck of a sheep”.

The last thing that I want to mention is growth potential. While no one can predict how any animal will grow, the ability of any market animal to grow rapidly must be considered. Generally, the larger framed goat that shows a long head, neck, cannon bone and body will grow faster.

Terminology:

Advantages

Larger Framed
Larger, growthier
More size and scale
Greater length and extension throughout
More structural correct on feet and legs
Tracks wider and truer in front/rear
Squarer on feet and legs
Leveler in the rump
Leveler topped
Stronger topped
Heavier muscled
More expressively muscled
More volume of muscle
More natural thickness
More muscle expression in shoulder/
forearm/loin/rump/leg
Meatier topped
Wider from stifle to stifle
Thicker, squarer rump/hip
Deeper through the twist
More uniform width from hooks to pins
Wider Tracking
More style and balance
Cleaner patterned
Smoother
More stylish
Nicer balanced
More eye appealing
More angular fronted
Longer, cleaner neck
Smoother blending through the front end
Blends smoother from shoulder to fore rib

Criticisms

Smaller Framed
Less outcome
Earlier Maturing
Quicker patterned
Weak/down in pasterns
Narrower in its kind
Hocked in or Splayed out
Steeped rump
Weak topped/breaks in loin
Breaks in Chine/roached in loin
Light muscled
Flat legged
Flat /narrow loin
Tapered into lower leg

Tapers from hold to pins
Narrow tracking
Narrow chested

Coarse
Poorly balanced
Ill made
Weak topped
Steep hip/rump

Coarse fronted
Shorter necked
Wasty fronted
Coarser made

These terms are some that should be used when asked to give oral reasons on a class of market goats. These are simply suggestions and there are many others that can be used when comparing two goats in a class.

Adapted from Texas A & M 4-H Meat Goat Guide by Frank Craddock and Ross Stultz and unpublished papers provided by Terry Burks, Dynasty Meat Goats, Kentucky