

Selecting Your Market Goat

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When it comes to selecting your projects goats there are many issues that have to be addressed. My first recommendation is to visit as many breeders as you can. With the growing ranks of goat breeders in the country is the number of potential places to buy your project animals is pretty limitless. I encourage you to develop a relationship with the breeders you are buying from. These breeders possess a wealth of knowledge about genetics, feeding programs, and other things that can give you that added edge in you goat project. My theory about choosing from whom to buy is really simple – if the breeder does not have time to spend with you in selecting and developing you project, then you do not have time to buy from them.

Some of the most important questions you have to answer before you select your prospects is, When do you plan to show your goats? What will be your terminal show? and what do you want your goats weighing at these shows?

Many shows today have minimum and/or maximum weight ranges that have to be considered, but currently not in Tennessee. It is also important to know what the weight range your judge thinks is ideal. Some judges want goats in the 100-120lb. range. In my area, most judges prefer goats in the 60-90lb. range. I personally believe that when judging market goats a judge should be the BEST one on that given day as long as it is close to an acceptable market weight. Obviously, light weight goats face the issue of being immature on their muscle shape, while heavy weight goats must address the issue of trimness and freshness. Either way, if you know that a judge will not use a goat weighing over 90lbs, then why not make sure your goat weighs less than that amount and give yourself the opportunity to win?

The issue of weights and weight ranges raises a second issue of how old should our goats be when we are showing them? This is a rather difficult question to answer. Due to breed variations and the various breed combinations that can be put together. There are limitless possibilities on the ages of your goats. In Tennessee, goats with baby teeth show in kid classes. Yearling does must have no more than 2 sets of baby teeth. Most literature cites showing goats at 5 to 9 months of age. The scientific reasoning behind this is due to a factor called the “inflection point.” The inflection point is the age of the animal when bone (frame) and muscle development has maximized and is increasing at a much slower rate. This is also the time that fat development is beginning to develop at an increasing rate. In most species of livestock, the inflection point occurs about the age of puberty. When we continue to feed goats beyond the inflection point, the animals will become MUCH fatter, unless nutrition is greatly changes. Once animals go beyond this point, they are also more difficult to keep fresh, a key factor in fitting market goats.

Now that we have muddied the water about the age of our goats when we show them, let's back up and address the second part of this issue – weight for their age. I have personally seen 90 day old goats weighing 30lbs. as well as 3 month old goats weighing 75 to 80 lbs. How the animals have been managed and fed plays a huge role when you select your projects. Quite obviously, that 80 lb. 3 month old prospect is going to have to be fed and managed very differently than the 30 lb. goat if your show is still 5-6 months in the future. TRUE, I agree that a 30lb. 90 day old goat is too small for its age, but if that prospect is really good and the price is right, it just might be the goat you need! So what is the answer to the age/weight question? There is not one single correct

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answer. I recommend to any member to sue a combination of the two. Make sure that your goat will be mature enough to maximize his muscle shape and maturity, but also keep his beginning weight in a range that will allow you, under normal management, to have his weight in the correct range at the conclusion of your project.

To compound your selection even further, is the sex differences issue. I have judged numerous market goat shows in which does and wethers compete side by side. We have different classes for each sex in Tennessee. When a doe reaches puberty and begins cycling, it is extremely difficult to keep them externally lean and fresh. This isn't to say that a doe can not beat a wether, but due to the fact that we know goats fatter from the inside out and we know that wethers are naturally leaner and heavier muscled than does, most judges are hesitant to make a doe champion. The other side of the coin is that does are generally neater fronted and more stylish and they have that little extra bit of style in the show ring to attract the judge's eye.

What breeds should your project be? Once again, there is not a correct answer for this question. As in all species, every breed has its positives and negatives that must be addressed. I personally have seen full-blood Boer goats that were fabulous as well as $\frac{1}{4}$ Boer goats that were incredible. Generally speaking, since we are showing meat animals, the higher the percentage of meat goat in the animal usually results in an increase in muscle mass when compared to dairy breeds. Conversely, a little dairy blood can also result in taller fronted, more stylish, MUCH firmer handling goats when compared to high percentage Boers. Then let's throw in the breeds of Kiko, Tennessee Meat Goat, Spanish, Angora, etc, etc, etc. There is no right or wrong answer when addressing breeds or breed combinations. Just find a goat you like and give your project a 110% effort.