

Breed Options for Meat Goat Production in Alabama

Meat goat production is a growing agricultural industry in the United States (US) and in Alabama. The number of meat goats and meat goat farms in Alabama and across the country over the last decade has steadily increased (USDA Census, 2002). Imports from Australia and New Zealand fill much of the domestic consumer demand for goat meat (chevon), creating a marketing opportunity for the nation's producers. Because of their highly adaptable characteristics and nutritional habits, meat goats can be an economical alternative for limited-resource farmers, enabling them to increase their annual income. Meat goats may fit in well with existing agricultural activities, allowing for a diversification of the farm portfolio and sources of income.

Genetic management is an important component of efficient meat goat production. This starts with an understanding of the various genetic resources available to use. Depending on production and enterprise goals, producers may choose from a variety of breeds and breed combinations.

Boer

The Boer goat breed was developed in South Africa. The improved Boer goat is the result of selection within the common South African goat population

for desired growth and carcass characteristics. Boer goats were first imported in the mid-1990s and are now popular meat goats in the U.S. The Boer breed is noted for its distinctive Roman nose and is typically white with a red neck and head. Some variations in the color of Boer goats include white bodies with black heads, solid red or black, and red

or black paints. The Boer is very popular as a show goat and has been instrumental in the dramatic growth of the U.S. meat goat industry. The Boer influence is widespread across the country and is evident in most commercial meat goat herds today. Adult Boer bucks generally weigh from 250 to 300 lbs. and adult does average 200 to 240 lbs.



Boer Buck



Boer Doe and Kids

BOER GOAT ASSOCIATIONS

American Boer Goat Association

1207 S. Bryant Blvd, Suite C.
San Angelo, TX 76903

Phone: (325) 486-2242 **URL:** www.abga.org

E-mail: info@abga.org

International Boer Goat Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 1045
Whitewright, TX 75491

Phone: (877) 402-4242 **URL:** www.intlboergoat.org

E-mail: intlboer@intlboergoat.org

United States Boer Goat Association

P. O. Box 663
Spicewood, TX 78669

Phone: (866) 668-7242 **URL:** www.usbga.org

E-mail: office@usbga.org

Kiko

The Kiko is a composite breed developed in New Zealand (NZ). The Kiko breed was developed in the mid-1980s by crossbreeding selected NZ feral does with bucks of various dairy breeds, such as Nubian, Saanen, or Toggenburg. Survival, growth, and maternal traits were traits emphasized during the formation of the Kiko breed. Kikos were first imported to the U.S. in the mid-1990s. The majority of Kiko goats are white or cream in color. However, other colors including brown, red, and black may be found in Kiko herds. Although both arrived in the U.S. about the same time, the Kiko did not enjoy the same fanfare as the Boer. However, increased interest in Kiko goats has occurred in recent years because of their ability to enhance hardiness in commercial meat goat herds. The new

level of interest in the Kiko is most notable in the southeastern United States, including Alabama.



Kiko Buck

Under proper care, Kiko bucks generally weigh from 250 to 300 lbs. and adult does weigh 100 to 150 lbs.



Kiko Doe and Kids

KIKO GOAT ASSOCIATIONS

American Kiko Goat Association

1005 Carlan Road

Jasper, Georgia 30143

Phone: (706) 337-5623 **URL:** www.kikogoats.com

E-mail: bbmkikos@frontiernet.net

International Kiko Goat Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 328

Williamsburg, KY 40769

Phone: (888) 538-4279 **URL:** www.theikga.org

E-mail: kikogoats2002@yahoo.com

Other Breed Options

Although there are four primary breeds, other breeds may be considered. Producers have used a variety of dairy breeds with varying levels of success. Research indicates that some dairy breeds may perform at a meat production level equal to or above those of the four main breeds found in Alabama. The Nubian breed, for example, is considered a dual-purpose breed with both dairy and meat potential. Although most Nubians in the U.S. have been bred primarily for milk, Nubian does have been successfully crossbred with Boers. Also, the Kiko breed has dairy breeds in its formation and there are traces of dairy influence in some Spanish goat populations.

One of the newest options available to meat goat producers in Alabama is the Savanna goat. This breed is similar to the Boer in that it was developed in South Africa and has a similar conformation, but is all white in color with black skin pigment. The number of Savanna goats in the U.S. is small at the moment, but as producers seek new breeds, the size of the U.S. Savanna population will grow and undoubtedly influence some herds in Alabama.

Myotonic

Commonly known as Tennessee fainting, wooden-leg, or stiff-leg goats, this breed is considered to be native to the United States. The breed originated in Tennessee from four goats imported from Canada. The various nicknames referring to this breed come from the hereditary condition of myotonia, predisposing the goats to experience temporary muscle paralysis when excited or frightened. During these episodes of "locking up," some goats' limbs will stiffen, impeding their ability to walk. Other goats may fall over and lie very stiffly on the ground. Periods of paralysis only last a few seconds. Myotonic goats are medium-sized and heavily muscled, with heavy rumps and deep chests. They can be found in a variety of colors, but black and white paint is the most common. Myotonic goats

have gained national and international attention due to their unique muscle traits.



Myotonic Buck

Under proper care, mature Myotonic bucks can weigh as much as 200 lbs., while does vary from 130 to 150 lbs.



Myotonic Doe and Kids

MYOTONIC GOAT ASSOCIATIONS

International Fainting Goat Association

3450 230th St.

Terril, IA 51364

Phone: (712) 853-6372 **URL:** www.faintinggoat.com

E-mail: ifga2@yahoo.com

Myotonic Goat Registry

P.O. Box 237

Chapel Hill, TN 37034

Phone: (931) 364-7206 **URL:** www.myotonicgoatregistry.com

E-mail: myotonic@myotonicgoatregistry.com

Other Breed Options *continued*

Management schemes, marketing targets, and personal preferences influence the choice of breeds. The availability of objective data evaluating these breeds for meat goat production is very limited. Fortunately, new research efforts are beginning to provide some information that may be used to assist meat goat producers in genetic management decisions relative to breed selection and utilization. Data are starting to reveal meaningful differences among breeds for a number of economically important performance traits. It is unlikely that any one breed is superior for all traits and within each breed there are superior and inferior animals. Therefore, it is important to identify and select superior animals for the desired traits, regardless of the chosen breed or breed combination.

Spanish

The Spanish settlers of the 1500s introduced goats to the region of the New World now called Texas and Oklahoma. These goats evolved through natural selection during four centuries in the American Southwest. Spanish goats had been primarily used to clear brush and to control undesirable vegetation from pastures and ranges. With increased interest in commercial meat goat production since the

mid-1990s, there has been a renewed interest in Spanish goats. A few breeders have also begun selection programs to improve the Spanish goat for meat production uses. Spanish goats are noted for hardiness under adverse conditions, probably as a result of centuries of "survival of the fittest." Spanish goats are generally small to medium in size and vary in color, though they are usually dark brown or black. There are no national associations that

maintain the history of or promote the attributes of these animals. Because of widespread crossbreeding with Boer goats, few herds of pure Spanish goats remain. However, a new appreciation for the attributes of the pure Spanish goat is spreading.

The Spanish buck size varies according to management. Mature bucks can weigh up to 250 pounds and does up to 150 pounds.



Spanish Buck



Spanish Doe and Kids



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Maria Leite-Browning, DVM, Extension Animal Scientist, Alabama A&M University

Myotonic goat photos courtesy of: Gene McNutt, Myotonic Goat Registry
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For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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