

# NEW YORK STATE 4-H DAIRY GOAT PROJECT FACT SHEET #2

By Dr. E. A. B. Oltenacu  
Revised April 1999 by Dr. tatiana Stanton  
Cornell University, Ithaca , NY 14853



## THE DAIRY GOAT BREEDS

One way to learn more about dairy goats is to become familiar with the different dairy goat breeds. A breed is a group of genetically related animals that reliably passes on certain characteristics to their offspring. For example, if you breed two German shepherd dogs to each other you can count on always having their offspring look like German shepherds and not poodles. Just like dog breeds, dairy goat breeds differ in how they look, but they also tend to differ in the amount of milk they produce.

Let's look at average milk yield and butterfat percentage (how creamy the milk is) in 1998 for the six breeds of dairy goats popular in the U.S.

<b>BREED</b>	<b>305 day yield (lb)</b>	<b>305 day yield (kg)</b>	<b>fat percentage</b>
French Alpine	1979	900	3.5
La Mancha	1771	850	3.9
Anglo-Nubian	1618	735	4.6
Oberhasli	1663	756	3.7
Saanen	1998	908	3.5
Toggenburg	1710	777	3.3

Notice that the total milk yield in this table for a goat milking for 305 days in a row is given in both pounds (lb) and kilograms (kg). In the metric system of measuring, milk is weighed in kilograms not pounds (remember 1 kg of milk = 2.2 lbs of milk). If you are used to thinking of milk in quarts, a quart of milk weighs a about 2.15 lbs or a tiny bit less than 1 kg), so you can use the kg column to figure out roughly how many quarts are produced. The French Alpine and the Saanen breeds are very comparable fat percentage. The Toggenburg breed average for milk and butterfat percentage is a little lower. The Oberhasli breed average is also lower for milk yield. These breeds were all developed especially for milk production in a very mountainous region of Europe called the Alps. La Manchas also tend to give less milk than Alpines and Saanens. They are a slightly smaller breed of goat developed in the U.S. from crossing various types of goats that made their way here from all over Europe. In the United States, Anglo-Nubians are referred to simply as Nubians. They were developed during British colonial times from crosses of British, Middle Eastern, and Indian breeds of goats. Nubians are known for their creamy, high butterfat milk and their tolerance to heat. Because their milk is more concentrated , they tend to give less of it. However, you can have individual Saanens that give less than an individual Nubian and vice versa. Within any breed there is a wide range of milking ability represented.

Each of these six breeds of dairy goats tends to look very different from the others. They each have different breed characteristics or traits that help tell them apart. The French Alpine (referred to simply as "Alpine" in the United States), Oberhasli, Saanen , and Toggenburg breeds all have straight or slightly dishd faces and erect ears. In contrast, the Nubian has long, pendulous ears and a "roman" or convex nose. The "La Mancha" has a very noticeable trait. It has such tiny earflaps that at first glance it may look like it has no ears. Believe me, it has ears! It hears just as well as the other breeds do.

Nubians and La Manchas come in a wide variety of colors and color patterns. However, the breeds originating from the Alps come in distinct colors and color patterns. Saanens are supposed to be white (or light cream) all over. Toggenburgs range in a brown color from light fawn to dark chocolate and have distinct white markings on ears, face stripes, lower legs and edging their tails. Oberhasli are a light to dark reddish brown with

black trim (facial stripes, stripe along their spine from ears to tail, belly, udder and lower legs). This color is similar to a bay horse. Alpines come in a wide range of colors and distinct patterns which are referred to by French names, such as “cou blanc” or “white neck”. They are not supposed to be Saanen or Toggenburg colored. There are hidden or recessive color genes in each breed so sometimes (very rarely) the breeds do not breed true for color. The Breed Standard available from the American Dairy Goat Association gives the details of what is the correct appearance for each breed and what exceptions to the “normal” coloring and markings are permitted. These specifics are important if you want to show or register your goat. They do not affect how much milk she will produce.

Let’s see what you know about dairy goat breeds:

1) Which nose is “roman”? dished? Write the answer beside the picture and write the name of a breed you would expect to have this trait.

a)



b)



2) Which breed would you be likely to choose if you lived in a hot climate and wanted creamy milk ?

3) Name the breed that has a bay color pattern.

4) Name the breed developed in the U.S.

5) Is a 3,000 lb. herd average above, below or equal to the Alpine breed average for milk yield?

#### Suggested Activities

1) Study the Breed Standard in the American Dairy Goat Association Handbook or in “Dairy Goat Judging Techniques” by Considine and Trimberger.

2) Search in your public library for magazine articles on the origins of one of the dairy goat breeds or on dairy goat breeds that are popular in another country. Note - past issues of both the Dairy Goat Journal and the United Caprine News are good places to start your search.

3) Have a formal debate in your 4-H club about which dairy goat breed is “best”. To make it extra fun, have the defendants support a breed they don’t own themselves.

4) Visit a goat farm that has several dairy goat breeds or go to a goat show and write down your observations about how the appearances and behaviors compare between the different breeds.

5) Do library research on what breed characteristics or traits of the Nubian would help it out in a tropical climate.

6) Get a world map or globe and pinpoint the areas where each dairy goat breed was developed.\*

7) Make a scrapbook of pictures and information about your favorite dairy goat breed.\*

\* activity is suitable for cloverbuds as well.

