

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

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## THE MEAT GOAT BREEDS

One way to learn more about meat goats is to become familiar with the different goat breeds that can be used for meat. A breed is a group of genetically related animals that reliably passes on certain characteristics or traits 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, goat breeds may differ in how they look, but they also tend to differ in the amount of milk they can produce and in the meatiness of their carcasses.

Goat meat is produced from many goat breeds in the U.S. including dairy goats. Dairy goats must kid in order to give milk. Often the goat kids are slaughtered and sold for goat meat at Easter time. The six popular goat breeds in the U.S. are

1) the French Alpine, Oberhasli, Saanen, and Toggenburg breeds which were all developed especially for milk production in the alpine valleys of a mountain range in Europe called the Alps. Their breed traits include short, erect ears and straight or dished faces and distinct color patterns. To find out more about the color markings of each Alpine breed, look at Dairy Goat Fact Sheet # 2.

2) the La Mancha which was developed in the U.S. from crossing various breeds of goats that made their way here from all over Europe. Their most obvious breed trait is tiny ear flaps that almost make them look earless.

3) the Anglo-Nubians (often just called Nubians) which were developed during British colonial times from crossing British, Middle Eastern, and Indian breeds of goats. They have "roman" or convex noses and long, dangling ears.

Alpine dams (mother goats are called dams) give lots of milk and tend to have big kids at birth. This is an advantage if you are raising kids for the Easter market where you need them to put weight on quickly. However, Alpine kids tend to get lean and leggy as they continue growing. This is because they have been genetically selected to put their food into milk rather than meat. In contrast, LaMancha and Nubian dams tend to give less milk and have lower birth weight kids, but the carcasses from older La Mancha and Nubian kids are generally fleshier than Alpine kids raised the same way. However, you must always remember that there are enormous differences within each of the dairy breeds for milk yield, weight gain and carcass quality. It is easy to find a particular Nubian that milks more than a particular Alpine, or a particular Alpine buck with a better meat carcass than a particular La Mancha buck. When selecting good meat goats, it is more important to evaluate the actual animal rather than to choose an animal sight unseen based on its breed.

The surplus offspring of fiber goats such as Angora goats and Australian Cashmere goats used for making mohair and cashmere clothing are also slaughtered for meat. Large numbers of goats used for brush control in the southern ranges of the U.S. are slaughtered every year to provide goat meat.

However, there are some strains of goats that have been genetically selected by man specifically for meat. Some of these are actual breeds while others of these are just beginning to have distinct traits that pass reliably from parents to offspring. The breeds or stains used in the U.S. have all been genetically selected from populations of goats brought by settlers to new countries. These goats were often allowed to become almost feral (run wild). Under these conditions, only those who could survive their rugged environment lived long enough to produce offspring. This type of genetic selection where nature not man choses which livestock will be used to produce offspring is called natural selection. These breeds or strains include

1) Spanish Meat Goat - Spanish goats are the descendants of goats brought to the U.S. by early New England settlers. They migrated south and probably interbred with goats brought into Texas and Mexico by early Spanish settlers. Their ancestry is as mixed up as that of a mongrel dog. Their rugged environment shaped them into very tough, rather small goats. Specific ranchers have genetically selected Spanish goats for better meat production by keeping only the biggest or meatiest bucks for breeding to females. Nubian bucks have sometimes been crossed with them to improve size, milk production of dams, and fleshiness of the kids. These meatier goats are known as Spanish Meat goats. They come in almost any color and are usually left horned. Their ears are somewhat pendulous but shorter than a Nubian's. Many of them produce a cashmere undercoat in winter.

2) Tennessee Meat Goat - in 1880 a flock of myotonic goats was identified on a farm in Tennessee. Myotonic means that they have a condition that caused their muscles to lock up whenever they were startled. Sometimes their muscles lock up so suddenly that they fall over. This was the origin of the Tennessee Stiff-Leg or Fainting Goat population. These goats come in many color combinations and have airplane ears (shaped like Alpine ears but not erect, instead they jut out sideways). Texas ranchers at Onion Creek Farm chose from this population, goats with the largest frames and heaviest muscles to keep for breeding purposes. Gradually they produced a goat that is larger and heavier than the original strain. These selected goats are known as Tennessee Meat Goats. The constant stiffening and relaxing of the muscles of myotonic goats may result in heavy rear leg muscling, tender meat, and a high meat to bone ratio.

3) South African Boer Goat - This South African breed probably resulted from crossbreeding of native goats raised by Bantu tribes and various European and Asian goats brought in by Dutch immigrants. In the 1800s, SA goat farmers started selecting for compact, muscular, short-haired goats. They were able to produce a strain of goat that bred true for high growth rate, muscular carcasses, good fertility, and short hair combined with a very distinct color pattern (white body and red head). In 1959, breed standards were adopted and they became a recognized breed. Boer goats were introduced into the US in the early 1990s. Under good nutritional conditions, Boer goat crossbreds produce outstanding weight gains and carcasses.

4) New Zealand Kiko Goat - The Kiko goat was produced in New Zealand by taking feral does that exhibited good meat conformation and breeding them with Saanen and Nubian bucks to increase their milk yield and butterfat content. Those bucks and does whose offspring grew best (as measured by weight gain) under rugged conditions were chosen to produce the future generations. Kikos have similar ears to Spanish goats but are usually larger framed. They are often white like their Saanen ancestors.

### Suggested Activities

1) Visit a goat producer who uses more than one breed of goat for meat or go to a meat goat show, and describe which goat breed or crossbreed you like best and why.

2) Study the American Boer Goat Standards as outlined by the American Boer Goat Association.

3) Search in your public library for magazine articles on the origins of a meat goat breeds popular in the U.S. or another country. Note - check the Goat Rancher, the Goat Farmer, and Goat Production in the Tropics.

4) Have a formal debate in your 4-H club on what goat breed is "best" for meat.

5) Give an oral presentation on how a particular goat breed is raised and used in the country it originates from. For example, how are Liaoning Cashmere goats raised and used in China?

6) Get a world map or globe and pinpoint the areas where the Kiko, Boer, Angora, Spanish Meat Goat and Tennessee Meat Goat breeds were developed.\*

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

\* activity is suitable for cloverbuds as well.