

NEW YORK STATE 4-H DAIRY GOAT PROJECT FACT SHEET #3



By Dr. tatiana Luisa Stanton
April 1999
Cornell University, Ithaca , NY 14853

BUYING A DAIRY GOAT

So you've decided to buy a dairy goat. OK -- let's start looking. First, if at all possible, find someone who knows a lot about goats to go "shopping" with you. This way they can help you avoid goats with serious problems and find a goat that meets your needs. They will also have a better idea of what a fair or realistic price is for specific goats. Do not buy your 4-H project goat at an auction. It is much better to buy it directly from the person who raised it. This way you can find out useful information about how it or its relatives have milked, what shots it has had, feed it is used to, and get any pedigree information necessary to register it. If you do not have a 4-H leader with goat experience to guide you, try to buy your goat from someone who is willing to give you advice if you run into problems with your goat. A local goat club or goat breeders' association is a good place to find out about goat raisers who are helpful and have good quality goats for sale. Your local Cornell Cooperative Extension office, the American Dairy Goat Association, or the NYS Dairy Goat Breeders Association, Inc. can give you information about regional goat clubs.

The breed you choose is your decision, but you will have more choice and find it easier to locate a buck to breed her to, if you decide on a breed that is popular in your area. It is better to not start out with an extremely expensive or fancy goat. If you wait until you have gained goat experience to invest in a very expensive animal, you will be better able to judge for yourself what sort of goat you would like to spend a lot of money on and whether you really need to. It makes sense to start out with a healthy, sound (sound means free of structural defects) goat whose relatives have good milk production and sound conformation. Goats who are registered as "Purebreds" (all their ancestors trace back to goats that were registered with their breed association when it was started) with the American Dairy Goat Association may cost more than goats that are registered as "Americans" (some of their ancestors come from unknown backgrounds), and Americans usually cost more than "grades" (goats whose pedigrees do not trace back to any known registered parents). Grade goats can usually be recorded as "recorded grades" with the American Dairy Goat Association under the breed they most resemble. Before you go shopping for a goat, you should find out whether your goat will need to be registerable with ADGA in order for you to show it at any 4-H shows you aspire to participate in. Remember that you cannot show dairy does that still have their horns, so be sure any doe kids you buy have been disbudded (had their horn buds burned so that the horns will never grow) and stay away from mature horned goats unless you plan on paying a veterinarian to remove the horns (dehorn). If the goat is milking, taste her milk to be sure that it has no off flavors.

Should you buy a doe kid or an older doe? It depends on what you want. If you want milk as soon as possible, choose a mature doe that is pregnant or already milking, and be sure to learn how to milk before she arrives at your home. If you can wait a year for milk and want the experience of raising your own kid, start with a weaned kid. You can also start with a 2 week old kid that you will need to bottle feed at least twice daily but this will take both a lot of work and a lot of milk. Don't make this choice unless you and your family have discussed and planned it out carefully and have experience caring for very young animals. Try to avoid buying an animal right when it is undergoing a lot of stress. For example, buy your doe at least a few weeks before or after kidding rather than right at kidding. If you must buy a kid right when it is being weaned and it has been bottle raised, ask if you can buy a gallon of milk to take home with it and bottle feed it a small amount of milk twice daily for the first few days you own it until it has adjusted to its new feed and surroundings. Goats are very sociable so it is a good idea to buy two goats rather than just one.

Ideally, the goat you are buying should look long and deep bodied when viewed from the side and wide between her legs when viewed from the front and rear. You want her escutcheon and udder attachment to be high and wide. She should have a shiny coat, level topline, and sharp withers.

Be sure to pick a healthy, sound doe, whatever her age. When you visit the farm, ask about the health status of the herd. Is the herd on a program to prevent a disease called CAE (Caprine Arthritis Encephalitis)? This usually involves raising the kids on pasteurized milk. Ask to see the milk production records for the goat you are interested in buying and her relatives, and ask yourself these questions as you look at her:

Do her eyes look dull or cloudy?	Yes	No
Does she have diarrhea?	Yes	No
Is she standing hunched up with her tail drooping down?	Yes	No
Are her eyes or nose very runny?	Yes	No
Is she coughing or breathing hard without having just done hard exercise?	Yes	No
Is her coat rough and flaky or does she have any bald spots?	Yes	No
Are her gums and insides of her eyelids very pale?	Yes	No
Does she have any unusual lumps or swellings on her body, legs, or udder?	Yes	No
Is she lame or stiff moving?	Yes	No
Does her milk taste bad?	Yes	No
Is she hard to milk or does her milk have milk clots or blood in it?	Yes	No
Is her appetite poor?	Yes	No
Does she seem depressed or weak and uninterested in her surroundings?	Yes	No

A yes answer to any of these questions often indicates a sick goat. Check carefully with the owner if you feel any of these health problems exist. Here are some ways to check how structurally sound the goat is:

- Is she double teated on either side of her udder?
- Are her back knees (hocks) extremely straight so that when viewed from the side she looks as if her back legs are fence posts? This is called “posty legged”.
- Are her ankles (pasterns) weak and long so that her dewclaws almost rest on the ground?
- Does her udder have weak muscles that let it hang down low so that it swings when she walks and is easy for her to accidentally step on or urinate on (ideally, her udder floor should be no lower than her hocks)?
- Are her front knees and pasterns crooked (toe in or out) when viewed from the front?
- Are her hocks and pasterns crooked (toe in or out) when viewed from the rear?
- When you open her mouth, are the teeth on her lower jaw way in front of (overshot, monkey jawed) or behind (undershot or parrot mouthed) the dental pad of her upper jaw?
- If she is a kid or has never kidded before, does she show symptoms of being an intersex?

Hopefully, you answered no to all these questions.

Suggested Activities

- 1) Make a list of goat owners in your area and the breeds of goats they keep.
- 2) Attend a meeting of a local goat club or goat breeders’ association.
- 3) Make posters of some of the structural defects or health problems to avoid in buying a goat.
- 4) Invite an experienced goat breeder to demonstrate with live goats for your 4-H group what traits they look for in buying a doe and why.
- 5) Have you 4-H leader hold a goat while you and your group discuss how you would answer the above questions on her health and soundness. *

- 6) Draw a picture of a sick goat. *
- * activity is suitable for Cloverbuds as well.