

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



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## BUYING A MEAT GOAT

So you've decided to buy a meat goat wether. 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 direct from the person who raised it. This way you can find out useful information about what shots it has had, feed it is used to, and how meaty its relatives look.. If you do not have a 4-H leader with goat experience to guide you, try to buy your goat from someone local who is willing to give you advice if you run into problems with your goat. A local goat club 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 or the Empire State Meat Goat Producers' Association can also give you information about local meat goat breeders.

Market wethers can come from almost any breed. But you will probably get a meatier kid if it is part South African Boer Goat. It makes sense to start out with a healthy, sound (sound means free of structural defects) goat kid that appears to have a good meat carcass.

You should usually buy a market wether shortly after weaning unless you raised him yourself from one of your own does. 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. Bottlefed kids are generally less meaty than kids that are raised on their dams and they are also easy to get very attached to. 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. Always keep in mind that this is a market kid and you are raising it to slaughter for goat meat. Try to avoid buying an animal right when it is undergoing a lot of stress. For example, if possible get a weaned kid a week after weaning rather than right at weaning. If you must buy the kid at exactly weaning be sure to find out what hay and/or creep feed it is already eating and buy a small amount of this feed from the seller to feed it at home the first few days while you gradually switch it to your own feed. Ask that it be given a Clostridium C and D shot within 2 to 4 weeks before weaning to try and protect it against enterotoxemia (overeating disease). If the kid has not been castrated yet, remember that you will have to get it castrated yourself in order to show it in most 4-H shows. Make sure the kid has been disbudded or was born naturally polled (hornless) if your local 4-H shows do not allow horned goats. Otherwise plan on "tipping" the points of the horn by removing the tips with a hack saw or hoof nippers at least a month before showing him. Goats are very socialable so it is a good idea to buy two goats rather than just one.

Ideally, the wether you are buying should look long in the loin (at least 6 inches long if 10 weeks old) when viewed from the side and very wide between his legs when viewed from the front and rear. You want his escutchen to be low and wide. Unless he is only a few weeks old you would like to see some muscle development on his thighs and forearms. He should have a shiny, glossy coat and look a little plump if he is still nursing from his dam. His withers should be rounded rather than sharp and he should be relatively level along his topline. Count on him growing about 2 to 3 lbs per week or about 10 to 15 lbs per month from weaning to slaughter age. For example, if you buy a kid who is 40 lbs at 12 weeks of age in late May and your 4-H show is in late August, your kid will likely weigh at least 70 lbs at showtime.

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you try to choose a wether to buy:

Do his eyes look dull or cloudy?	Yes	No
Does he have diarrhea?	Yes	No
Is he standing hunched up with his tail drooping down?	Yes	No
Are his eyes or nose very runny?	Yes	No
Is he coughing or breathing hard without having just done hard exercise?	Yes	No
Is his coat rough and flaky or does he have any bald spots?	Yes	No
Are his gums and insides of his eyelids very pale?	Yes	No
Does he have any unusual lumps or swellings on his body or legs?	Yes	No
Is he lame or stiff moving?	Yes	No
Does he have a fever?	Yes	No
Is his appetite poor?	Yes	No
Does he seem depressed or weak and uninterested in his surroundings? Yes	No	
Is he having trouble urinating?	Yes	No

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

Are his back knees (hocks) extremely straight so that when viewed from the side he looks as if his back legs are fence posts? This is called “posty legged”.

Are his ankles (pasterns) weak and long so that his dewclaws almost rests on the ground?

Are his front knees and pasterns crooked (toe in or out) when viewed from the front?

Are his hocks and pasterns crooked (toe in or out) when viewed from the rear?

When you open his mouth, are the teeth on his lower jaw way in front of (overshot, monkey jawed) or behind (undershot or parrotmouthed) the dental pad of his upper jaw?

Do the toes of his hooves spread far apart from each other when he walks?

Hopefully, you answered no to all these questions.

If you are buying a meat goat doe or doe kid for breeding purposes, you will also want her to have a healthy udder. It should not be double teated nor should it hang so low that it can be injured easily or hard for newborn kids to nurse from. You generally want her to show less dairy character when not milking than a dairy doe would. Her withers will often be rounder and her escutchen lower than on a dairy doe. If she has kidded before, make sure she was a good mother and that her kids grew well while nursing from her, indicating that she had plenty of milk for them.

### Suggested Activities

- 1) Make a list of goat owners in you 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 or a meat goat slaughterer or buyer to demonstrate with live goats for your 4-H group what traits they look for in buying a slaughter kid and why.
- 5) Have your 4-H leader or an older 4-Her hold a goat while you and your group discuss how you would answer the above questions on his health and soundness.\*
- 6) Draw a picture of a sick goat.\*

\* activity is suitable for Cloverbuds as well.