

# EMERALD DAIRY GOAT ASSOCIATION

Cottage Grove, Oregon

## SELECTING DAIRY GOATS

Dairy goats make ideal 4-H and youth projects. The animals are interesting, like attention and respond to handling, are easily transported, and are fun to show and care for. Young people learn responsibility by having the daily care of goats. They also learn about nature's processes by caring for animals as they learn citizenship, sportsmanship, and the value of cooperation and working with others as they take part in the club program.

Goat breeders are willing helpers with 4-H goat clubs, and many adults provide leadership and information to help members. One way to start is to grow into the business by starting with a bred doe or a couple of kid goats.

Be sure you have the time to give your animal regular care before you decide on raising them.

Will you have adequate housing or room to erect other buildings for your animals? Is there land enough to have an outside yard and pastures or at least some land for browse? Pastures and hay-land are not absolutely necessary if you have the means to buy hay and grain.

## What Kind of Goat to Buy?

Some of the things to consider when deciding to obtain a goat:

Should I buy a grade or purebred animal? What are the common breeds?

How do I determine good type in a dairy goat?

What kind of records should be available for the animals purchased? Should I purchase young kids or older animals?

## Discussion

A beginner may give serious consideration to purchasing grade animals if cost is a factor. It may be possible in the area where you live to purchase purebred goats at a reasonable price because there are more available.

Remember there are good and poor purebreds and good and poor grades. Simply because an animal is registered does not mean it will be a good type or from a high producing family. A grade goat may be a good type and from a high producing family, or it may be undesirable and of little use to anyone.

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### Your Main Interest

If your major interest in dairy goats is milk production for home use and for sale, good grade goats would be a good investment. On the other hand, if you are interested in breeding and raising purebreds for sale and to show in recognized special classes, you should start with registered animals.

Generally a good grade milker can be purchased for less money depending on her production record. Unrecorded grades can be bought for still less since no record of production has been kept, Purchase of unrecorded animals, however, is more of a gamble. Take someone with you who knows dairy goats, and visit a number of breeders to look at the animals. These people can be of considerable help to you in making your decision.

### Breeds of Dairy Goats

The five main breeds of dairy goats are French Alpine, Nubian, Sannen, Toggenburg, and American LaMancha. All breeds thrive equally well in all parts of the country, and all possess high milking ability. There is little difference in the production level among the breeds, except that the Nubian rarely gives as much milk as the other four breeds. Nubian milk, however, averages higher in butterfat percent.

You may look at several breeds and decide you like a certain breed, particularly if the animals of that breed appeal to you personally. If you plan to raise breeding stock and show animals at fairs, it may be wise to select a breed that will have enough entries for good competition.

Listed below are some of the main breed characteristics of the different breeds:

Nubian -- Distinguishing features are long, wide, pendulous ears, and the convex Roman nose. Nubians may be of any color or combination of colors, either solid or patterned. Common colors include black, grey, cream, white, shades of tan, brown and rich reddish brown. Common markings include lighter colored ears and facial stripes, as well as lighter colored muzzle crown and underline. Overall light or dark colored spots or patches of any size are often found. The minimum doe size should be at least 135 pounds, and the minimum height at withers of 30 inches.

French -- These goats are large rangy goats, characterized by a variety of color and " patterns that might include the following:

White neck, tan neck, or black neck. The body and hind quarters of the first two of these are usually black or dark in color, whereas the body and hind quarters of those with black necks are lighter in color. There may also be found other color variations of cinnamon, various shades of red or white. The same minimum weight and height as for Nubians.

Saanen -- The Saanen is a medium size goat with rugged bone and plenty of vigor. Nose, however, should be feminine, and not coarse. The color may be white or cream and the cream may vary in shade from light to dark fawn. White is generally preferred to cream. The hair should be short and fine, although a fringe over the spine and thighs is often present. A Roman nose is undesirable for this breed.

Toggenburg - The Toggenburg is a sturdy, vigorous goat of medium size, with short or medium length hair of soft fine texture and lying flat against the body. The color can be

a solid color, varying from light fawn to dark chocolate with distinct white markings. The white markings usually are found at the ears, two white stripes down the face from the eyes to the mouth; hind legs white from hocks to the hoof; front legs white from the knees downward; a white triangle on either side of the tail and frequently a white spot in the area of wattles. Minimum weight for does is 120 lbs., and minimum height is 26 inches.

American La Mancha - This breed is of more recent development in the U.S., and may be any color, but they are distinguished by their external ears which are either absent or very short. The different type ears are known as "gopher" and "cookie". Any color combination is acceptable, and the hair is glossy, fine, and short.

### General Characteristics.

Except for the Nubians and La Manchas, the other three breeds should all have erect ears, straight or dished faces, and an alert and graceful carriage.

### Recognizing Good Type

A dairy goat should be angular, with prominent hip bones, lean in the legs and neck and alert. Any tendency for an animal that is short and thick in the body, the neck or in the thighs, or in any way fat and meaty is not desirable for dairy purposes. Meatiness is the opposite from milkiness .

Good body capacity as shown by spring of rib, depth, width and length of body is generally associated with larger capacity and a stronger animal. The legs should be straight and the animal should walk easily and freely. The skin of the dairy goat should be smooth, pliable, and the hair reasonably fine to denote quality, but sometimes this will vary with the breed.

After becoming familiar with desirable type through judging and studying different animals, you will be in a better position to know what type of animal you are selecting. You will learn by becoming familiar with the dairy goat score card which describes and evaluates each body characteristic.

## Starter Animals

Usually kids are cheaper than yearlings or mature animals. The beginner may wish to start with kids to get acquainted with them and their habits during their growth, before having the responsibility of managing milking animals. This also allows time to become acquainted with the various animals available for breeding and to learn what to do at freshening time and other management practices for goats.

Sometimes it is better to have two animals so they will be company for one another.

Lone animals frequently get lonesome and noisy. There is no fixed rule to what to buy.

If you can buy a good older bred doe that will give you some well bred kids at a reasonable price, this might be desirable.

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## Production Records

If the breeder can show you the official DHIA records on the mother of the kids you are interested in, this is to your advantage. These records should be on the nearest two generations to the animals you are considering. Records of production reported in quarts and pints (volume records) are not always accurate. Look for consistence in milk records from month to month on a daily basis and over a period of 8 to 10 months total milking time.

A record lasting for ten months of 2500 to 3000 lbs. would be a good producer. Records higher than this level would be even better. The length of lactation or the time from freshening to going dry is a very important characteristic. Watch for records on animals that milk less than nine months per lactation.

