

Kikos Could Become the 'Angus' of the Goat World

By Dave Sparks, D.V.M.

They tell me that there are about 600 Kiko breeders now. I wonder how many of you are old enough to remember when every pasture was filled with red cattle with white faces, while Angus cattle and breeders were both considered upstarts.

Today within my personal circle, I can name three purebred Hereford breeders, while it would take a pretty big sheet of paper to list the successful Angus breeders in this area. How did the Angus association come from so far behind? They paid attention to what consumers wanted and what commercial cattlemen needed.

Have you heard of the Angus as the "leaner carcass breed", or the Angus cow as "nature's perfect mother". With these goals in mind, they found ways to measure these traits and develop them in their breeding programs. Meanwhile, the whiteface breeders were promoting the "mellow, yellow, Hereford".

Today the Kiko is the most prolific and efficient meat goat in the world. The question is, can we stay there - or even better - copy the Angus to come from relative obscurity to dominate the industry? The answer is yes, but only if we are willing to make the management decisions to move forward. We can't improve if we are just breeding one Kiko to another Kiko to have a Kiko offspring to sell.

We must define our goals as a breeder, find ways to measure these goals, and then make culling and replacement decisions based on what we learn. I know of one breeder who claims to have each generation better than their parents, but they do not bring in any new genetics and sell any animal they produce. How is this possible?

Assuming you have identified your goals, forage-based buck tests are a great way to see how your program measures up to other breeders. There are tests in Oklahoma and Maryland that are taking entries now. Of course, we can't send all of our bucklings to test, and we need to know how our doelings are performing also, so we now turn to on-farm performance invoicing. I have addressed how to do this in this publication in the past (March 2008), but I will be glad to help you if you still have questions.

Believe it or not, reproduction traits are even more important than growth. It doesn't matter how big your kids get if there are not enough of them to hop on the trailer when the time comes. I recently weaned the triplet kids from a 90 pound doe that had a combined weight of 118 pounds. No doe will raise a single this big and very few can do it with twins.

Your herd average should be close to two kids weaned per doe bred. If not, you need to work in this area. The does that do not breed or that have singles once past their first kidding should go to town and the ones that consistently have twins or can have triplets and raise them themselves should be supplying your replacements. What about parasite tolerance, udder confirmation, feet problems, ease of handling? Again, set your parameters and stick to them. Today we are on the frontier of EPDs (Estimated Progeny Differences). The future belongs to those who use them and make their management decisions based on them.

All of this requires the hateful word, culling. Who wants to send a kid to slaughter if someone might show up and offer big dollars? I once heard a person at a goat conference tell one of my colleagues that she couldn't cull that doe because she paid too much for her. My friend replied, "If you paid so much for the goat that you can't cull her, you paid too much." Instead of asking ourselves if we can afford to cull a doe, maybe we should be asking ourselves if we can afford not to. Your reputation as a breeder and all your future sales depend on it.

A breeder that I once did business with has created a reputation for selling goats that are not quite what they are represented to be. He is not a bad guy, he just puts his wallet ahead of his integrity. He is continually looking for ways to sell goats because folks won't buy them off the farm. Perhaps more important, if you are not willing to cull the individuals that aren't working and bring in new genetics that will, where will you be five years from now?

Today we are all looking for new ways to market our goats. One fact, however stands clear to me, we can't have a superior market unless we have something superior to market. There are a lot of Kiko breeders and the number is growing. We all have goats to sell. Why are your goats better?

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