

Market Goat Essentials

Overview. Approximately 10,000 goats will be involved in the 4-H market goat project this year. Many hours over several months will be devoted to the proper selection, care, feeding, and management of a potentially award-winning goat. The 4-H goat project is another tool used in youth development. The basic information and resources needed to support market goat projects are as follows.

Questions to Ask. To adequately address the needs of the 4-H family interested in exhibiting market goats, the following questions may need to be asked:

- What are the goals of the 4-H member and family?
- What shows or time of the year will you exhibit the project(s)?
- Will you need assistance in locating and selecting your project?

Selection.

Breeds. In Texas, all breeds of market goats are shown together with classes being broken on weight only. The major shows in Austin, Odessa, and Fort Worth have a 50-pound minimum weight limit with no maximum weight limit. San Antonio and San Angelo have a 60-pound minimum and 115 pound maximum weight limit. Austin has a 60-pound minimum and a 120-pound maximum weight limit while Houston has a 65-pound minimum and a 115-pound maximum weight limit. In most of the major shows there are eight to 12 classes of market goats.

Age of Goat, Fall Born vs. Spring Born. Goats for summer and fall shows are generally born from October to January (fall born) while goats for winter and spring shows are generally born from February to May (spring born). Spring born goats can also work for summer and fall shows, but some may not reach the minimum weight required or have the maturity needed to be competitive. Some shows (Dallas, Odessa, and San Antonio) require goats to have their baby/milk teeth at show time. Goats will normally lose their baby teeth at 10-to-12 months of age.

Quality Considerations. Other selection criteria include structural correctness, muscle, volume and capacity, style and balance, and growth potential. When selecting goats, be aware of fatness or body condition. Young goats that are bloomy and fat look good while thin goats do not. Learn to look past fat and recognize muscle.

Where to Purchase Goats. Goats may be purchased by private treaty or through auction sales. As a general rule, fall born goats are sold March through June and spring born goats are sold June through September. Information on various breeders and goat sales is available through magazines such as “The Showbox” and “The Purple Circle.”

Health Papers. Some major shows may require market goats to have health papers upon entering the show grounds, therefore, check major show catalogues to determine requirements.

Validation. Goats must be state validated in the month of June for the State Fair of Texas and in the month of October for the major winter shows (Odessa, Fort Worth, San Antonio, San Angelo, Houston, and Austin). Most county shows also require goats to be state validated. Tags for the State Fair of Texas are ordered the last of April and tags for the major winter shows are ordered the first of September through Dr. Frank Craddock in San Angelo.

Facilities and Equipment. Facilities need not be elaborate. The barn should have at least 15 sq. ft. of space per goat, be well ventilated, well drained, and open to the south and/or east. Goats should be kept cool during summer and warm during winter. Fence height should be at least 42 inches to discourage jumping and made of a material that will keep predators out. The most desirable pens are constructed from galvanized livestock panels that are five ft. tall with four-inch squares. Portable feeders should be hung at the same height as the top of the shoulder of goats being fed and cleaned daily. Individual feeding stalls are an excellent way to measure feed consumption. Fresh water is the most important ingredient in feeding goats. Water troughs should be small so they can be drained and cleaned daily. Other equipment needs may include a stiff brush to clean water troughs, a shovel to clean pens, scales, trimming table, electric clippers with proper combs and cutters, small animal grooming clippers, syringes and needles, blankets and/or socks, halters, collars, and/or show chains, hoof

trimmers, drench gun, small portable feed troughs, soft brush for grooming, water bucket, show box, hot air blower, extension cords, muzzles, and electric fans.

Nutrition, Management, and Exercise. There are no magic feeds or rations that make champions. It is the total feeding program, including the feeding schedule, the exercise program, and the careful observation during the growing and finishing stages that makes a champion. The five basic nutrients are water, protein, carbohydrates and fats (energy), minerals, and vitamins. Agents should recommend a balanced, commercially prepared, pelleted ration with a crude protein range of 14 to 18 percent. The ration should also contain ammonium chloride to help prevent urinary calculi and a coccidiostat to help control coccidiosis. Do not constantly change rations and never make abrupt changes in the amount of feed being fed at each feeding. Goats should consume two to three percent of their body weight per day. Weigh goats on a regular basis. Feeding and exercise go hand-in-hand. Exercise is an excellent way to condition and tone goats and help control excess fat deposition. Goats are very active animals and, if given enough room and objects such big rocks or wooden spools to climb and jump on, they will exercise themselves. An exercise track and a trained dog is considered the best method for exercising goats but other methods such as the use of four-wheelers is beneficial. Goats should be exercised extremely hard and fast for short distances of 300 to 400 yards. Exercise programs should begin two to three months before the show, depending on the ration fed and the condition of the goats.

Health. The key to a healthy goat is the development of a preventative health program. It is a good practice to assume that newly acquired goats have had no treatments. The two major problems in goats are enterotoxemia (overeating disease) and internal parasites. For enterotoxemia, give one shot upon arrival followed three weeks later by a booster shot. For internal parasites, drench goats upon arrival followed by another drenching three weeks later. Other diseases one should be aware of are urinary calculi, coccidiosis, soremouth, polioencephalomalacia (thiamine deficiency), ringworm, and pinkeye. Preferably goats should be disbudded at 14 to 28 days of age. If not disbudded, then the horns should be tipped four to six weeks before the show. Regular hoof trimming is also necessary. Agents and exhibitors should utilize a local veterinarian to diagnose and treat diseases and develop a preventative health program. State and federal laws and regulations concerning the use of drugs for livestock are established to protect human and animal health. When administering drugs, always follow label instructions, including withdrawal time before slaughter. The use of a drug in a manner other than stated on its label is regulated by the U. S. Food and Drug Administration and may be done only under the control of a licensed veterinarian. Most Texas livestock shows have strict policies against the illegal use of drugs and will disqualify animals if such drugs have been used.

Fitting and Showing. Most of the major shows in Texas enforce the shearing rule, which generally states that goats must be uniformly shorn 3/8" or less (slick) above the knee and hock joints, excluding the tail switch. It is not always necessary to wash goats before shearing. Using a hot air blower to remove excess dirt is recommended. Washing will be necessary if goats are extremely dirty or muddy. Shear goats according to show rules at least two to seven days before the show. Hair below the knees and hocks should not be shorn. Hair on the end of the tail should be bobbed. Small animal clippers may be needed to clip closely around the eyes, ears, pasterns, or delicate areas on the goat. If shearing in cold weather, cover goats with a sock and/or blanket immediately after shearing. A clean, well-bedded pen should be provided to keep goats clean and dry. Goats should be halter broken and then taught to lead by using a collar or chain. Goats should also be taught to set their feet and legs and also how to brace. Many shows and judges do not want the goats braced, however, most shows and judges will allow goats to be braced so they must be taught how to brace. Halters should never be used in the show ring, only chains or collars. Remain standing at all times, do not squat or kneel. Showmanship clinics should be conducted to teach proper showmanship techniques.

Rules. The Exhibitors' Handbook contains the rules for a particular show. Each show is different and the rules change from year to year. Each year, take the time to review the rules of each show and keep a copy of the rules on hand while at the show. Ignorance of the rules is not a valid excuse for breaking them. One key section in all Exhibitors' Handbooks is the "Animal Health Regulations." Most major livestock shows (and some county shows) require a current set of health papers on an animal before entry onto the show grounds. Review the

health requirements outlined in the Exhibitors' Handbook at least a month before the show because some tests required by the Texas Animal Health Commission take a week or more to perform.

Other Information.

Agent Responsibilities: Project visits and management, validation, knowledge of entry deadlines (August 25 for State Fair of Texas, December 1 for all other shows), manage entries to major shows.

Contacts: Other agents, specialists, MENTOR volunteers, breeders.

References: 4-H Meat Goat Guide by Frank Craddock and Ross Stultz, AS 3-4.060