



AKGA PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

A M E R I C A N K I K O G O A T A S S O C I A T I O N ®

S E L E C T I O N

The Kiko Goat originates in New Zealand, as we all know. It was produced on “Hill Country”. The group of original breeders using a breeding arrangement where a core group of especially selected dams were used to produce sires. These sires were then used on satellite farms to improve their herds. The best does from the satellite herds were moved to the core herd to attempt constant improvement.

So, one might ask, what characteristics were used to guide selection. Growth under conditions that were standard in the area of development was the primary driver of selection in the program initially. Using primarily growth to determine selection helped to not slow progress toward the breeding goals of the group.

Using too many variables during selection was avoided in order to maximize improvement in growth rates. Another criteria used in the core

herd was that does were required to rear twins as a two year old. Apparently later there was also a zero tolerance policy for susceptibility to “foot rot”.

So what can AKGA Members learn from the original breeders and how can we develop a way to select our replacements which helps us to improve our herds?



I M P R O V I N G O U R H E R D S

The idea that using too many selection criteria slows progress is an interesting one. Sometimes it is helpful to have someone with a lifetime of breeding experience to boil things down to an axiom. My mother once cautioned me that, “you can’t cull for everything or you’ll end up with nothing!” The point being made was that priorities must be set.

That begs the question, what are your breeding goals and which traits or characteristics should a breeder prioritize in their program? Your priorities will be

determined by your goals. Are you trying to expand a meat production herd rapidly or are you aiming to achieve herd “improvement”? Are you keeping the maximum number of female replacements or a limited number – Maybe only 10-20%?

SETTING PRIORITIES

If you want to maximize your number of goats, obviously you will need to be more forgiving of some faults than you may be later when you have achieved your desired herd size. Selection should be for healthy and prolific goats with reasonable soundness and a range of live weights can be tolerated for the initial stage of herd expansion. Very small goats for the herd average should be avoided as they frequently suffer from bullying related problems. Extra small goats may be unhealthy and maybe even be carrying disease. You may tolerate more problems initially but remember that those problems seem to re-occur in families and you may need to eliminate an entire family later when you have your desired herd size.

The extra work to get that family to work for you may all be wasted in the end. Selecting against work-intensive goats will pay off.

Sire selection in an expanding herd will be very important as the selection pressure is less intense on the female side. Selection pressure, therefore, needs to be very intense on the sire side.

In herd improvement breeding, one has to have the knowledge and data to assess the herd and determine how it needs to be improved and maybe even why it needs to be improved. In attempting rapid improvement, be extra cautious. Rapid changes in genetic composition of a herd can cause the loss of positives in the pursuit of the “perfect”. Sometimes, better

can be the enemy of good.

The variability of the genetic composition of a herd will be a factor to consider. When a breeder is breeding long enough, hopefully the herd will start to show some consistency. A consistent type will make changes less difficult and a consistent genetic make up can be used to harness various breeding strategies such as line-breeding or within-breed-out-crossing etc.

Determining which traits are tolerable in the short term, and which ones are very difficult to eliminate when even briefly tolerated, is knowledge accumulated usually through experience. However, experienced breeders can sometimes shorten your learning curve with their own opinions and insights.

SELECTION CRITERIA

One way to handle selection criteria for all herds is to pick some selection criteria that you feel are the most important. Then create your “top priority” selection criteria list. This list should have only one or two traits.

Then put your remaining important traits on a second list. We may call the second list “Secondary Selection Criteria”. That list should be short too with only three to four criteria.

This will allow you to focus on your top priorities but not accumulate excessive amounts of negative traits, which may be detrimental to your production and does’ longevity.

Over the next two Spring 2017 newsletters from the AKGA Performance Committee, we will look more closely at selection in a commercial herd, and a purebred herd and discuss if there is a difference.

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