

4 Steps To Help Improve Your Dairy Herd

1. Have A Clear Goal For Your Herd

Goats are a huge investment. You put time, money and hard work into taking care of them. It is very important to know what YOU want from raising them. If your goal is to learn how to make cheese, you will need lots of milk so it makes sense to have a good milk producer. Taking care of one goat that gives you 2 gallons a day might be easier than 3 of the same breed that only give you a ½ gallon. If all you want is a pet, keeping weathers to go hiking with you is a great option but you'll want an athletic goat with strong legs and feet. The point is to know what you want so you can align your efforts to meet those goals.



2. Know Your Dairy Scorecard

The goal of the unified scorecard is to aid in the selection of the type of dairy goat that can function over a long productive lifetime.

-ADGA Handbook



If you know what is on a dairy scorecard, you will have a better understanding of what a show judge looks at and why. The scorecard breaks the animals down into parts that are each worth a percent of the whole goat. Most associations compare these categories:

- General Appearance
- Dairy Strength
- Body Capacity
- Mammary System

Sr. does, Jr. does and bucks are all judged slightly different based on gender and age. Obviously bucks don't have mammary systems, so more emphasis is placed on their front end assembly, correct structure of legs and feet, and smoothness in movement. Likewise for Jr. does since their mammary has not yet developed. In Sr. does the mammary is worth 35 points on the scorecard. The mammary is worth more since the whole purpose of breeding the animal is to produce milk.

3. Keep Detailed Records

The smallest detail can make a huge difference in breeding programs. Records are important to have so you know what each animal is producing. For keeping track of vaccinations and medical needs and knowing what animals are related to each other and how closely. When you have to make the tough decisions to cull a herd, it makes it easier to know what the value of each animal is and get rid of the ones that don't help you reach your herd goal.



Suggestions for Dairy Records:

- **Breeding Charts** - If your goats are registered or not, it's important to map out who is bred to who, how many kids come in each breeding and any difficulties during pregnancy or birth.
- **Milk Production** - Measuring how much milk a doe gives per milking, per day. How long is the doe in lactation? This allows you to chart a doe's peak production and better judge when to re-breed her or not if she doesn't meet your goals for milk production. Kids being sold will go for a higher dollar when their dam is an excellent producer.
- **Feeding Charts** - It's important to know how much feed costs and how much each animal consumes. You can determine the ratio of feed consumed to milk produced and see if a higher quality or different type improves production without increasing amount fed or cost.
- **Shows and Show Results** - Keeping track of how well your goats do compared to other herds is good to see how "*on track*" you are for meeting breed standards and your goals for your herd. If you are selling animals, a higher price can be put on a kid if its parents and siblings have proven themselves in the show ring and in the milk pail.

***How much and what kind of competition a goat has is important. A grand champion doe in a ring of 45 goats is more likely to be higher quality than a GC of only 5 competitors. Something to consider when you are buying a goat from breeders who advertise "winners", was it a local fair or a sanctioned show?

4. Research Prospect Herd Sires

In short when you're looking for a new herd sire, go through steps 1-3 with every prospect buck. Ask yourself these important questions:

1. What are your herd goals?
2. What are your herd strengths and weaknesses? What areas in your herd need the most improvement? Is your prospect buck correct in his conformation? Are his strengths complementary to the improvements you want to make in your herd?
3. What kind of records are available on the prospect buck? Is he healthy? Is he registered? What kind of producer is his dam? What does *his* sire's dam look like? If he is a sr. buck, what does his progeny look like? If he has siblings, are they quality producers?

Knowing the answer to all or at least most of these questions can help you narrow down the choices for a new herd sire that will continue improving your herd letting you grow as a breeder. Finding the right match for your herd can be as easy as 1.2.3!

Picture:
Desert Nanny
AB Rocket Boots

Sire and Dam Photo
Courtesy of
Sharon Warren

