

Central Washington Animal Agriculture Team



Fact Sheet # 1010-2004

Selecting a 4-H/FFA Meat Goat Project Animal

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Meat goat projects at county fairs and junior shows across the Pacific Northwest (PNW) are increasing in popularity. Many youth producers and their parents are discovering that goats make an excellent 4-H/FFA project. Goats are small in size, intelligent animals and easy to work with.

After deciding on a meat goat project, youth need to do their homework prior to selecting the animal. It is important to identify the show(s) you will be attending prior to selecting the animal. Each show is slightly different concerning requirements and rules governing their event. It is the responsibility of the exhibitor to read the general and special rules for the show they are attending. By sending in an entry form the exhibitor is agreeing to abide by and uphold the rules of the show. The premium books, extension newsletters, and news releases will allow exhibitors to identify the fair dates, weight limits, ownership dates, entry deadline, and any special contest requirements (i.e. rate of gain testing, pre-weigh ins, etc.). At this time it also important that the youth and parents set down and identify resources available and goals for this project. Be sure to identify financial matters, such as; funding sources available for the animal, feed, equipment, and facility purchase or upkeep.

After all important pre-selection information is collected, youth are now ready to start contacting breeders to select a goat. It is important to keep scheduled appointments with breeders, as they are busy and may have other commitments. The selection process is important because it can greatly impact the final results of the projects (quality and health). However, it is also important to remember that good selection, good management, correct feeding, and proper fitting and showing techniques all contribute to a successful end project.

Weight: The finish weight of meat goats seems to vary greatly in the PNW. This is for multiple reasons: 1) not all animals can be fed to the same finished weight because differences in frame size, 2) the breeds of goats and their crosses impact the amount of muscle and the finished weight of the goat, and 3) goats are marketed in the commercial market at a variety of different finish weights depending upon consumers' demands. Many shows in the PNW have a minimum weight of 60 pounds; and some shows have a maximum weight. Goats will typically gain approximately 2-3 pounds per week with a proper nutrition program.

Structure correctness: Structure refers to how the goat's skeleton, or bones,

is put together. Emphasis should be placed on the feet and legs, top line, rump and shoulders. The goat should stand and travel wide on both front and rear legs. The legs should be straight with strong pasterns. The top line, back and loin region, should be relatively level from the top of the shoulders to the hook bones (hip). The rump should be long and square with a slight slope from the hooks to pins area. The shoulders should be smooth, blending into the neck and the fore rib.

Muscle: Muscle is very important in a meat goat projects, because it impacts the quantity of meat harvested from the animal. General muscling in the animal is identified by handling and viewing the muscle quantity and definition in the loin and hind legs. The loin should be broad and thick. The goat should have a deep expressive rump and leg muscle. Wider standing and walking goats are generally heavier muscled. The goat should also be wide through the chest floor with a defined, large forearm.

Balance: Balance is described as “eye appeal” or the goat’s overall appearance. This is a subjective measure that is different for each judge. Generally it is interpreted by how well the body parts (neck, shoulder, rib cage, loin, rump, and leg) blend together. The parts of the body should flow smoothly into each other. A balanced goat holds its head erect. Typically, a well-balanced goat is one that catches your eye when you first enter the pen.

Be sure to ask the breeder for information about the birth date, castration date, dehorning date, vaccination schedule and types, deworming schedule, feed type and amount, and confirmation of the name and telephone number of the breeder. Write this information down in your records and store it in a place you can refer to.

Each judge has their own definition of the ideal meat goat and the amount of emphasis they place on each of the selection criteria. Remember, the participation in a youth meat goat project should not be for just purple ribbons or the sale of the animal. This is an opportunity to learn about the production, feeding, and management of a meat goat and develop valuable life skills.