

A QUICK GUIDE TO CLUB GOAT SELECTION

It is most important to understand that selection of market goats is different than the selection of breeding goats. More specifically, market goats differ from the characteristics used in judging or selecting breeding goats. In Mississippi, age of prospects selected for Dixie National will be important in achieving proper weight and finish for your market goat. Prospects with a high percentage Boer influence should hit in the proper weight break when born anywhere from January through May depending on frame score. In the show ring today, ideal market weight will range from 80-100 pounds. In the industry a 60-80 pound goat demands a top price. The ideal condition or finish on the market ready goat is a thin, but uniform, covering over the loin, rib and shoulder. The external fat thickness over the loin at the 13th rib should be between .08 to .12 inches or an average of .10 inch. Market goats carrying over .12 inches of fat cover or weighing over 110 pounds are usually undesirable as goats tend to deposit internal fat first and more covering over the rib indicates a very fat goat. This information is important to know when selecting your prospect in order to determine the direction you will be taking your project goat and to achieve desired show characteristics. The type goat you select will have a major impact on the project animal's results. A winning market goat is a combination of proper selection, nutritional management, health management, and grooming, combined with good showmanship.

Selecting the proper prospect is the most important step to a good project animal. The criteria you should consider for selection of a prospect meat goat will include **muscling** (growth and expression), **conformation** (structural correctness), **general appearance** (style and balance, size, volume and capacity) and **growth potential**.

Muscling is an important trait for market goats and must be given strong consideration. To determine muscle you can look at the shape of the loin and size of the forearm. The loin is a good indicator of muscle throughout. Forearm circumference will correlate to the loin eye area and is a good an indicator of meatiness in thinner goats. The goat should have a broad, thick back and loin that are naturally firm and hard handling. A wide, symmetrically oval shape on each side of the backbone that carries forward over the rack or chine is desirable. The goat should show a wedge shape from front to rear when viewed down the top from behind. At the shoulder, muscling should increase from the chine to the point of the shoulder with the thickest muscle occurring immediately above the chest floor. Usually a goat that walks and stands wide will be heavier muscled. The hindquarters should show a deep, heavily muscled leg and rump. A long, deeply attached muscle that shows expression in the stifle is desirable. The goat should be thickest from stifle to stifle when viewed from the rear. A goat should be wide through the chest floor with bold shoulders and a forearm muscle that exhibits a prominent bulge and ties in deep at the knee.

A good **conformation** market goat should be rectangular in appearance from the side with a straight, level top and bottom line. The length of rump, length of body and length of leg are important. A goat should have a strong, level top and a long rump with a slight slope from hooks to pins. The goat should be heavy boned and strong on the pasterns. The feet and legs should be straight and spaced square and wide under the goat. You should avoid goats that are post-legged or cow-hocked. Avoid goats with open shoulders, weak tops, weak pasterns, or steep rumps.

The **general appearance** of a good show goat should be one of style combined with balance. The goat should not look to be pieced together. The goat's height measured at the withers should be slightly more than at the hips, and the head should be in proportion to the body. The goat should blend in smoothly at the shoulder blades and remain free of excess tissue up through the neck. Style and balance means the entire body blends together from front to rear. The relationship of body length to body depth and width equates to volume and capacity. Goats should be long bodied, with adequate depth and spring of rib. When measured from the base of the neck to the base of the tail, an outstanding goat should percentage out at 55 percent hind saddle or better. This means the goat will achieve a greater percentage of his overall length down his top from the last rib back. Avoid goats that are short bodied, shallow bodied, narrow based or flat ribbed. Goats will need to have an adequate length of cannon bone from knee to pastern and should be above average in overall length of body and general size. The cannon bone length is a good indication of skeletal size. The legs should set with the feet pointing straight ahead. The ideal market goat package, when viewed from the side, will show a smooth shoulder, level top, trim middle, and straight legs.

The ability to grow rapidly or **growth potential** is important. A larger framed goat that shows a long head, neck, cannon bone, and body will grow faster, be larger, and be more competitive in the show ring. These qualities combined with good muscling, structural correctness, volume and capacity, and style and balance describe a competitive prospect meat goat. Lastly, remember that muscle and fat will play a part in your selection of a prospect. Young goats that carry a lot of bloom will always look good while young, thinner goats might not look as nice. Learn to look past bloom and fat when selecting prospects. Train your eye to identify muscle and fat and to know the difference. Thinner goats that are genetically superior and possess the correct parts, when combined in a balanced package, can provide an outstanding prospect at a reasonable price.

If you utilize the tools of selection as you evaluate prospect goats, you will be more likely to have success with the project animal. Selection of the proper type prospect is only the beginning of the project. Proper health and nutrition play a major role in the growth and development of your goat. Likewise, proper fitting and showing techniques afford you a much better opportunity for success with your goat in the show ring. The proper selection technique, feeding program, health program, fitting and grooming, and your showmanship ability combined with a little luck will go a long way on the road to success with your club goat project.

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