



Selection of Replacement Females

Ask the Experts

The selection of replacement females is critical to the success of your operation because they are the foundation of the genetics that will be present in your herd/flock for years to come. Many considerations need to be made when selecting females, as our experts have so eloquently shared...

Replacement Females for Fiber Production

by Madeline Norman & Mary Anne Holmes

Choosing a replacement ewe or doe for your fiber flock requires some extra consideration because a fiber animal's fleece is of paramount importance. As with other physical characteristics, she will pass her fiber traits to her offspring. Since that fiber is your source of income, it bears as much consideration as health and maternal instinct. Your replacement ewes and does are the foundation of your reputation as a quality fiber and livestock producer. Be thorough and select only the best!

Sheep

Before you step foot on the farm to look at your prospective replacement ewe, consider your flock goals. Are you breeding for color or spots? Do you want a larger or smaller framed animal? Do you need to increase your lambing rate

or parasite resistance? Do you intend to show animals or fleeces? Do you need to increase staple length, crimp, or luster? Are you looking for less grease or guard hair? Your replacement ewes will shape your flock for the years ahead; make sure they contribute to your vision.

After you have evaluated the ewe's physical condition and seen her move around the pen, get your hands on her. Look at the staple length of her fleece, check for guard hair or scurf, and make sure that the fleece is even across the entire animal. If the ewe has been shorn, ask to see a sample of her fleece, her lambs' fleeces, or any products that have been made from the wool such as yarn or finished objects. If fleece is available and you are able, you may take a moment to spin it and see what kind of yarn she produces. Ask what the grease and finished weights were for her most recent clip, how often she is sheared, and check records such as micron count or clips from years past. Hold a lock up to your ear and test it for breaks. This will tell you if something is off in the animal's health; you may evaluate whether the issue has been resolved or if she will be a liability on your farm.

Madeline Norman has been raising primitive breed wool sheep since 2008. When she's not shearing, spinning, or knitting by hand, Madeline advocates for sustainability and fiber art through hands-on experiences at schools, festivals, and her podcast, available at

ballyhoofiberemporium.com or through iTunes.

Goats

A fiber goat should have a uniform and fairly dense covering of hair. If it has ringlets or waves, it should cover the entire body. The hair should come up under the chin and go well down the legs. Hair on the face is not as important as on the neck area. They should have the characteristic mohair top-knot. If you do have a goat that has a tremendous amount of facial hair, you may want to trim or tie it up with rubber bands to prevent injury from impaired vision.

Usually the goats that have the loose floppy skin on the neck shear heavier than the smooth neck. This is more noticeable on the traditional white angoras. The colored angoras have made great strides in the last several years to become more competitive with the traditional white.

If fleece weights are not available, you can grab a big handful of hair on either side of the abdomen to give you an idea of the density of the hair. Since you will be using or selling the fleece you want a dense fleece. Keep in mind that the fleece a buyer sees at a sale is not always a true fleece weight depending if it has been heavily skirted.

Kid fleeces are finer than most adults and females finer than males, but then there are always the exceptions. You will hear breeders and spinners refer to the "handle" of the fiber. This encompasses the fineness of the fiber, softness, luster, curl,

crimp, and wave of the fleece, length of the lock and lock type, and density of the fiber on the animal. Most processors like the hair to be between 4-6 inches. This allows for approximately 1 inch growth per month with shearing in the spring and fall approximately 6 months apart.

You will want to avoid an animal that has an excessive amount of kemp fibers (fibers which are brittle, coarse, dull, and flat). This type of fiber does not accept dye and breaks off when processed.

Selecting a yearling or 2 year old is a good time to see the body size and structure, and the lock structure will be evident. They have gone through at least 2 shearings and should be ready to breed. Keep in mind that you want them to be at least 60 pounds before breeding.

Mary Anne Holmes lives with her husband, Earl, on a farm in Pleasureville, KY, where they raise Gotland and Icelandic sheep, angora goats, and beef cattle.

Replacement Females for Dairy Goat Production

by Kathy Jones

Every dairy goat producer will agree that each breeder of dairy goats has their own style and opinions when it comes to a good dairy doe. Preferences in does will rely heavily on the type of dairy goat being produced and the goal of the operation. For instance, my goal for the past 22 years has been to produce more for the old style Nubian type, emphasizing longevity, health, milk production and personality. However, regardless of the type of goat you want to produce, you should keep some basic things in mind when buying replacement does.

First, look at the doe's physical appearance. The physical appearance can tell you a lot about the health of the doe. Buying healthy females will pay off in the long run. Glossy hair is generally a good indication the doe is not malnourished. Run your hands over the doe's body to make sure you don't feel any lumps and swellings, as this may indicate a disease that you don't want to introduce into your herd. Ask for records on worming, vaccinations and get an idea of the breeder's overall health management practices.

Second, look at the width of body especially in the hip bones. Good width in the hip bones will make it easier for the

doe to deliver kids.

Third, if the doe is in milk, check her udder attachment to make sure it is well attached and not pendulous. Make sure the udder is not lop-sided as that could indicate mastitis.

Fourth, ask for the doe's milk records. Look for a consistent production of milk and not one that varies.

Lastly, make notes on the breeder's overall herd management practices. Remember, herd management is a major factor that impacts the production of your dairy herd. You can have the best genetics in the world, but it won't pay off if your animals are unhealthy and managed correctly.

Kathy Jones has been raising Nubian dairy goats for the past 23 years, in Clark County, KY. She tries to give back to the goat industry by hosting goat related clinics and supporting the goat industry in KY.

Replacement Females for Commercial Sheep and Goat Production

by Kathy Meyer and Tess Caudill

Whether we are talking about sheep or goats, commercial production is all about getting total pounds of kids or lambs to market as quickly and efficiently as possible. The first aspect of selection is to personally determine your preference of production and management systems. You will want to purchase females that were raised in systems similar to yours in order to maximize your dollars spent. For example, if you would like to lamb in the fall, purchasing black face replacement ewes which have not been selected for fall lambing will probably not be the best fit for that particular production system. Similarly, it would not be prudent to purchase replacement females from a high intensity, full feed, confinement operation and expect those females to perform well for you in a lower intensity, forage based operation.

Once you have determined your optimum production and management systems, you are ready to look at actual replacement females. When selecting replacement females for a commercial operation it is extremely important that

animals are structurally correct, free of signs of disease, free of genetic defects, etc. Look at the physical appearance. Females should have dry tails and noses. Dirty tails can be an indication of parasitism. Runny noses can be an indication of poor nutrition, parasitism, bacterial or viral infection. Replacement ewes/does or ewe lambs/doelings ready for breeding should have enough fat cover over their back and ribs but not too much. Rule of thumb: if the spinal process feels like the back of your hand then they are okay. If you can't feel bone they are too fat, if you feel sharp bone they are too thin. This is an oversimplification of what is called body condition scoring.

Other factors beyond what you can physically see should also be considered as visual perfection does not in any way guarantee performance. New or experienced producers need to look at the production records of the females or in the case of ewe lambs/doelings, the records of their dams. **Records should:**

- Indicate what kind of birth the female had (single, twin, triplet) and if the birth was from a ewe lamb or doeling. Buyers should be looking at females that consistently have multiple births.
- Include the date of birth. Buyers should select females that lamb/kid, or were born in, the first two cycles or first 35 days of lambing/kidding. Those are likely the more productive ewes.
- Note if the female, or dam of the female, had a normal, trouble free birth and if there were any mothering problems. Mothering problems include udder troubles and disposition.
- Indicate what vaccinations the female has received and when were they administered, and when the female was last dewormed and what product was use? If the current wormer is working for the female, then the new owner should continue with that wormer.
- Provide growth performance records such as weaning weight, Average Daily Gain (ADG), etc. as these should be fairly important to most commercial sheep and goat producers. But remember that management system has to be considered when evaluating growth performance. Lambs that are on full feed in confinement should have a better average daily gain that

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lambs grown on pasture so make sure you are comparing apples to apples.

Kathy Meyer and her husband Tony own Final Frontier Farm, located in Paris, KY. They manage 140 Texel crossbred spring lambing ewes in a companion grazing system with 45 Angus crossbred fall calving cows.

Tess Caudill is the marketing specialist for the for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture and has been instrumental in developing a graded marketing program for goats and sheep. She has a B.S. degree from the University of Kentucky in Animal Sciences and currently raises goats, sheep and cattle in Harrodsburg, KY.

Replacement Females for Wether and Purebred Sheep and Goat Production

by *Endre Fink, Denise Martin and Jessica Johnson*

Sheep

When selecting wether type ewes to add to a current program or to start a new flock, the first thing you need to do is to determine what your goals and prepare a budget accordingly. Secondly, determine the breed characteristics you want your wethers to exhibit. The most popular breeds are Hampshire, Southdown, Dorset and Suffolk. However, crossbreds are as popular as, or even more popular, than the individual breeds in wether shows. So, when purchasing ewes to produce club lambs, you are not limited to just purchasing registered purebred ewes; crossbred ewes between the breeds mentioned above should also be considered.

Visual appraisal when selecting these females is very important. When selecting ewes to produce club lambs in particular, we need to choose females which are heavily muscled. Muscle is the number one criteria used when evaluating club lambs, so these mothers need to have an adequate amount of muscle, but at the same time they need to exhibit some femininity and refinement throughout the front end. The trend right now in the wether shows is to select club lambs which are moderate in size with a lot of muscle and bone. The lambs winning most of the major shows also carry a great deal of wool on their feet, legs and head, hence the popularity of the

Hampshire breed right now.

It is important to mention that within some breeds of sheep, you may find a contrast in breeding programs among producers, meaning there can be two different types of sheep within the same breed. The two types are what we call 1) breeding type or breeding sheep and 2) the other is wether type or wether sheep. I have previously discussed in some detail what characteristics to look for when purchasing wether sheep. If breeding sheep is the type you are looking to purchase, the same general selection criteria discussed earlier will apply however, more emphasis should be placed on overall size and scale, and frame and growth performance. Less emphasis is placed on muscling in breeding sheep ewes than in wether ewes. When purchasing breeding type ewes, more than likely you will be purchasing a registered animal. Just about anything there is to do with breeding sheep, whether it is a show or a sale, will require a registration paper. In recent years, breeding type sheep are not typically commanding the extremely high prices we are seeing with the wether type sheep. However, I feel their popularity is increasing lately due to the increase of slick shorn classes at most shows.

Endre Fink obtained his B.S. and M.S. Animal Science degrees from the University of Kentucky College of Food and Environmental Sciences. Since that time he has worked as assistant and now Shepherd and Research Specialist at the Oran Little Research Campus Sheep Unit. Additionally, he and his family manage a club lamb operation in Winchester, KY.

Goat

Although I have a registered herd of show quality does, when selecting replacement does for my full blood Boer goat operation, I remember that Boer goats are meat animals. Therefore, it is important to me that the female has good muscling. I determine the amount of muscling by evaluating the following:

- long level backs that are wide
- long length of the spine between the last rib and the hip
- look at the hip and again select for length
- wide loin area
- wide stance between their front hooves and back hooves (indicates muscling in the chest and between the hind legs

- heavy bone in their legs (I need these girls to make kids with a lot of muscle and a spindly legged doe isn't going to make those kind of kids.)

All of this being said, I also choose does that are feminine, even with these heavy bone and wide stance requirements. Sometimes "bucky" does seem to have hormonal issues that may impact their ability to produce. I always check the vulva to be sure it is appropriately sized, as that may be indicative of reproductive ability.

Denise Martin and her husband Brian Have been raising meat goats for 15 years in Magnolia, KY.

By definition, there is no difference between a wether type doe and a fullblood registered doe. The difference, however, lies in the emphasis of certain traits and characteristics.

When selecting wether type does you want style and balance, and rib shape but you want to have a more compressed almost wedge-shaped body type that would create more width over their top to give them a more impressive handle over their rack and loin.

Look for a quality framework, as this is necessary to handle the muscle and growth we want our show and production animals to possess.

Once you have evaluated the physical characteristics of a female, look at the genetic makeup. Do your research and look at a farm's past and present progeny to see how the prospective females can be an asset to improving your herd. Never be afraid to ask the breeder questions. If possible ask to see the dam and sire of the animal you are purchasing and any past production records. You will not always be able to have this luxury but when given the chance, it is a great advantage.

Jessica Johnson in partnership with her mother, Dr. Beth Johnson, has been actively involved in raising market club goats for 12 years. Her interest in goats began when she was 6 years old when she started showing market goats. After exhibiting as a youth livestock exhibitor and active in the 4-H/FFA livestock judging competition, Jessica has continued her interests in the market goat division as a producer and a livestock judge. She is active in the breeding, kidding and fitting operation at Keinan Boers in Parksville, KY.