

by Vicki Watson

My husband David and I live on a farm in Auburn, Kentucky. We started raising goats about 18 years ago. We started with one boer buck and 7 does. We learned quickly that the Boer goats were hard to raise, we lost more than we raised. We sure didn't know what we were doing either. Had lots of pasture but no goat proof fencing and they were a lot different than raising cows. Around 2008 my husband went to a Kiko sale in Bowling Green, Kentucky and brought back two registered goats. One doe and one buck. They were both from Oklahoma and my first thought was how expensive these goats were. They were Kiko's and we knew nothing about this breed or about raising goats correctly. So we started researching and learned quickly that we had made the right choice. This has been quite an adventure and a learning experience for us.

Our herd consists of 64 breeding Does and 24 yearlings. We have 3 registered bucks, that are New Zealand and Purebred. We have several young registered New Zealand Bucks also. Several of my Does can be registered as New Zealand and some Purebred. We have only bought two Does since we started with the Kikos I like to raise my own. We rotate the Bucks or replace them so they aren't breeding their daughters. I sell mostly commercial. We try to raise good goats and sell for other people to start their herds. We sell mostly by word of mouth. We're trying to build our reputation as good breeders. We'd like to start going to the big sales and meeting other Kiko breeders in person. (this year 2021 my herd consists of 72 breeding Does, 26 yearlings Does and 50 young Does, 2 registered New Zealand Bucks).

We have read lots about the Kiko breed. We have talked to lots of people who have raised Kiko's, but I think the best learning is from experience. One thing about a Kiko is that the less you coddle them the better they are. We've gone from getting them in stalls for kidding with heat lamps and keeping them in the barn to letting them kid right out in the pasture and letting them bring their kids to the barn if they want too. The weather has a lot to do with it. It's been a really wet year and we've tried to keep the girls up on the hill for kidding but when you have to keep them in the same pasture for long periods of time that leads to other problems.



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I sold some does last summer to some people who were just starting with Kikos. They took them home and later sent me information about the fecal testing they did. The goats had a really high fecal count but were doing really well and that is the kind of resistance we are striving for.

Fencing, good LGD's, disease, parasites, markets, medicine, breeding, record keeping, having a good vet and nutrition are all things you better know if you are going to raise goats no matter what breed you choose. Also, know other good experienced goat people. One thing I've learned is if it's a goat it's possible, and anything can happen. The best thing about Facebook is not just getting to talk to my family and grandchildren but I get to talk to other Kiko breeders. One thing I like to do is talk about my goats. If you are around me very long you will hear stories about my Kiko's. I have plenty to tell. My favorite story is about our three legged goat, Goldie. She was caught in a tree and hung by her front leg during a storm. When my husband David found her he thought she was dead. He carried her back to the house and off to the vet we went. She lost her front leg, but still gave us great kids for about 6 more years. That's Kiko tough. But, it always amazed me at how many people would ask us, if we knew we had a three legged goat?

My husband and I are both on the board of directors for the Kentucky Goat Producers Association. It's a great opportunity to help people who raise goats and mentor those just starting. Great opportunities to meet other goat breeders and get good information. I love people to come see my goats. I'm proud of what we have accomplished with our Kikos. One of

my favorite things to do is mentoring new goat farmers. We try and help as much as we can and even invite them to come help us work goats. Hands on experience is the best.

The hardest thing for me to learn was culling goats that have problems. It is hard when you spend time with them and think you can fix the problem, or give them one more chance. I am doing better and this year we've culled several Does. I tell people when they ask me about raising goats that it is not for the faint of heart. There are joys and there is heartbreak too. Most recently one of my New Zealand Bucks was late coming up to eat and I went looking for him. Up from the back pasture he came dragging his front leg. He had broken it. So off to the vet we went. He broke the bone between the shoulder and the knee. So he's in a cast and enjoying all the special attention he's getting right now. But, he was a promising Buck that was going to move up in rank and be the top guy here at the farm. We are just hoping that he heals well enough to be able to breed. He has given us great kids for the last few years. (Since this article was written, we lost this Buck, he had to be put down. We couldn't save his leg)

We have had some pretty good storms during kidding season this year. One of my Does decided to kid just before she got to the barn in the middle of a downpour. When we found her she had managed to get two of her triplets cleaned up and standing. But one little fellow was still covered in after birth and not moving. When we picked him up he was breathing but very cold. Got him into the house and a makeshift incubator (a cardboard box and a blow dryer) and I left him while we went to take care of some others. A few hours later he was yelling for

food and we weren't even sure he would make it. He is a bottle baby now, his name is Oscar and he's outgrown everyone. He is Kiko tough!

Some of our biggest challenges of raising goats has been the weather, parasites and fencing. The last two years have been so wet and most of our pastures are low so they stay pretty wet which comes with lots of problems with feet and parasites. We either don't have time or it is too wet to do fencing, but we're hoping to get some done this spring. My husband has discovered high tensile wire is the best and we've had lots of success with it. Parasites are worse when it stays wet. We think we have them beat and they hit again. When you can't rotate your goats because of the wet pastures, I am thankful for the Kikos that have high tolerance. We are starting to see more of this in our herd now with culling and good breeding.

Our kidding season is coming to an end with 109 live births. (This was in 2020, this year we had 139 live births) Just a few left to kid and the weather hopefully will get better and the forage will be good this year. We have lots of fencing to do and lots more to learn With all this quarantine time and social distancing we've been busy here on the farm with our goats and haven't had time to think about the COVID 19 virus. I'm thankful I live on a farm and I am thankful for a husband who tolerates my obsession with goats. If you ever want to talk about goats or share information about what you know, I'm willing.

Watson Farm Kikos Vicki and David Watson
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