

Evaluating Meat Goats

By Kraig Bowers

Meat Goat Selection

Boer goats, easily recognized by their white bodies and red or black heads, have become more and more popular throughout the United States. The increase in Boer goat production started in the south, but has now spread through much of the United States, especially the Midwest. There are several reasons for the increase in Boer goat popularity including: lower start-up cost, ease of management, ability to utilize low quality forages, and most importantly an increase in demand due to an increase in ethnic populations with a higher per capita consumption of goat meat. We have also seen an increase in 4-H Boer goat projects. This is a relatively low cost project in comparison to beef, sheep, or swine, and many youth find them to be an enjoyable project. With the increase in numbers, comes a need for greater education, not only in raising these animals, but also in evaluating them. Thus, in 2008, the state of Indiana will be adding a class of Boer goats to the state and area livestock judging contests. Many of the national judging contests are adding a class of Boer goats, as well. It is important that we reflect these changes in our state contest in order to prepare the students who qualify for national contests.

General Evaluation Tips

Judging meat goats is very similar to evaluating other livestock, but there are some differences, as well. Judging Boer goats is especially similar to judging lambs. For the purposes of this pamphlet, we will discuss the evaluation of Boer goats in two areas; composition and conformation. Within composition, we will look at muscle, condition, and freshness. In the area of conformation, we will analyze structural correctness and balance. Boer goats should be evaluated from

the ground up and the rear forward. Students should start by appraising the animals from a distance of fifteen to twenty feet, and then move in for close inspection.

Composition

Composition of Boer goats can be broken down into muscle, condition, and freshness. We will first look at muscle, which is one of the most important characteristics of Boer goats. Muscle can be evaluated in four main areas; the rack or withers, loin, forearm, and leg. A goat should be wide-based when viewed from behind, wide from stifle to stifle, and wide through the upper hip. They should be heavily muscled through their inner and outer leg, and tie deep into their lower leg. Evaluating the rack and loin, these areas should be expressive, wide, and deep. The loin should be long and the length of hindsaddle (the distance from the last rib back) should be greater than from the last rib forward. The fourth place to evaluate muscle is the forearm, and greater importance is placed on this region than in lambs. The forearm of the goat should be thick and have a prominent bulge.

Boer goats should handle trim, but uniform with a finished fat

depth of .08 to .12. One major difference in Boer goats compared to sheep is that they lay down fat from the inside out. The third part of composition is freshness, which can be looked at both in appearance and handle. A fresh goat should have a shiny hair coat and appear healthy. In addition, a goat should handle bloomy, not dry over their rack and top.

Conformation

In evaluating the conformation of Boer goats, we need to look at skeletal correctness of the body and of the feet and legs, as well as balance. Boer goats should be wide structured through their front and rear legs, and wide through their lower skeleton, including width



through the lower chest and body cavity. They should be adequate in body length and bold sprung showing a prominent spring to a deep rib, with the body depth of the animal making up around 60% of the total height of the animal. Looking down the top of the goat, the rack and loin should be wide and expressive. Stepping back and viewing it from the rear the widest point of the goat should be from stifle to stifle.

It is important to remember that volume is three dimensional. Evaluating length, depth, and width together gives a true determination of volume. This is of great importance in breeding does as volume influences the success of the pregnancy and the performance of the doe upon parturition. In breeding and market goats, volume is important to the feed efficiency of the animal, giving the animal enough room for its internal organs so it can grow and gain efficiently.

Evaluating the underline on Boer goats, they should be level from their chest to their flank. They should be nearly level down there top, being slightly higher at the apex of their shoulder than at their hooks. Boer goat breeders and judges prefer a slight slope from hooks to pins. Boer goats should be average in height and have a long neck that angles slightly out of the top of their shoulders. The head of the animal should be long and broad, with ears that are correctly placed so as not to cover the eyes. The teeth of the Boer goat should meet its dental pad evenly and correctly to aid in grazing.

Evaluating the feet and legs of a Boer goat is very similar to looking at the feet and legs of any other animal that is considered to be structurally correct. The front legs should be squarely placed under the goat and the feet should be pointed straight forward, not splayed out or pigeon toed. The leg should angle slightly back to the knee and the knee should blend smoothly so that it does not have too much set and at the same time is not bucked over. The pasterns should have enough slope for the goat to have cushion and flexibility during movement, but at the same time the pasterns should be strong enough that the animal is not considered to be down on its pasterns.

The rear legs should be set squarely underneath the goat, with the rear toes pointing straight forward. From behind, the legs should be neither hocked out or in, but square with each other. The legs should be angled back to the hock and the hock should angle back to the ground at about a twenty degree angle, which allows the goat enough freedom to move correctly. More set to the hind leg creates problems with

the goat being able to support itself properly, especially pregnant breeding does. A hock that is too straight restricts the mobility of the goat. When set in motion, the goat should track straight and flexible off of both the front and rear legs. Bone and foot size is important, as well, with the rule being that "bigger is better".



One of the most important traits stressed in Boer goats is the idea of balance. This is one of the more difficult concepts for beginning judges to grasp. Some of the most advanced evaluators still have trouble seeing it. Balance

in its true definition would be the equality of mass when comparing the front and rear halves of the animal being evaluated. With Boer goats, as with all livestock, an animal is more efficient and valuable when there is equal or greater mass in the rear half than the front half. In evaluating balance, certain characteristics need to be looked at to see if they are in proportion to the rest of the animal. For example, length of body, and length of neck should be in the correct proportion to the width and depth of the animal, in order to be called well balanced. The goat in the picture above displays excellent balance, possessing as much or more mass in the rear half than the front and having dimensions (length, width, and depth) that are proportional to each other.

Balance is not only important from a performance standpoint, but also for an animal's appearance. Goats that are well balanced are considered more "stylish". Notice also that the goat pictured above is slightly taller at the withers than he is at his hook bones. He is also slightly taller at his chest floor than at his rear flank. This is desirable in goats. The fact that they are at least level in these two areas adds to the balanced look of the goat.

Priorities

The characteristics of Boer goats can be appraised in the same manner for both does and wethers, however the way we prioritize these characteristics differs according to the gender of the goat.

Does

1. Structure
2. Capacity
3. Muscle
4. Balance

Wethers

1. Muscle
2. Structure
3. Balance
4. Finish

Goat Judging Terminology

Skeletal Correctness

Advantages

Tracks wider and truer in front/rear
Exhibits more style and correctness when traveling
More desirable slope to the shoulder
More correct /desirable set to the pasterns
Neck blends more smoothly into the shoulders
More fluid/flexible stride
Smoother, cleaner through the shoulders
More nearly level from hooks to pins
More width between the fore/rear legs
Legs placed more squarely under the body
More desirable size/number of teats
More structurally correct on its feet and legs
Straighter/more correct in the foreleg when viewed from the side
Greater length and extension through the front end
Appears to offer more future growth and outcome
Appears to be faster growing
Higher weight per day-of-age
More overall dimension and capacity
Broad through the chest floor
Deeper and more expandable in his/her rib
Longer bodied/loin/rump
More circumference of heart
More substance of bone
Squarer on its feet and legs
Deeper in the heart girth
Longer, deeper bodied
More angle to the shoulder
Stronger and more level in its topline
More correct bite
Longer, freer striding
Larger, growthier
More capacious
Wider chested

Truer tracking
Deeper ribbed
More spring of rib
More functional udder
Larger framed
More size and scale
Higher volume
Bolder sprung

Criticisms

Shoulder blades set tighter against the chest wall
Udder problems indicated by
Lower weight per day-of-age
Short, tight strides off both ends
Restricted in its movement
Less future and outcome
Constricted in the fore rib
Narrow through the chest floor
Pinched behind the shoulders
Sharp over the rack
Short bodied/loin/rump
Parrot Mouthed

Monkey Mouthed

Weak topped

Hocks in

Steep rumped

Post legged

Straight shouldered

Early maturing

Tight ribbed

Narrow chested

Flat ribbed

Small Testicles

Weak on its pasterns

Splays out/toes out in front

Short bodied

Sickle hocked

Small framed

Quick patterned

Narrow gauged

Shallow bodied

Frail

Muscle

Advantages

More expressively muscled

Thicker topped

More muscle expression in shoulder/forearm loin/rump/leg

More uniform width from hooks to pins

More volume of muscle

Thicker in loin/lower leg

Thicker, squarer rump/hip

Deeper through the twist

Heavier muscled

More natural thickness

Wider tracking

More forearm muscling

Wider from stifle to stifle

Meatier topped

Criticisms

Light muscled

Flat/narrow loin

Narrow tracking

Flat legged

Tapered into lower leg

Tapers from hooks to pins

Balance

Advantages

More style and balance

Nicer balanced

Nicer profiling

More level top/hip/rump

Cleaner patterned

More eye appealing

Smoother

Squarer hip/rump

Criticisms

Coarse

Poorly balanced

Steep hipped/rumped

Weak topped

Femininity

Advantages

Exhibits more femininity through the front end

More femininity through the head, neck, and shoulder

Blends smoother through the neck-shoulder junction

Smoother blending through the front end

Blends smoother from shoulder to fore rib

Longer, cleaner necked

More angular fronted

Criticisms

Coarse fronted

Too masculine

Short necked

Coarse shouldered

Wasty fronted

Now, lets take a look at some pictures of goats and evaluate them based on the qualities previously discussed.

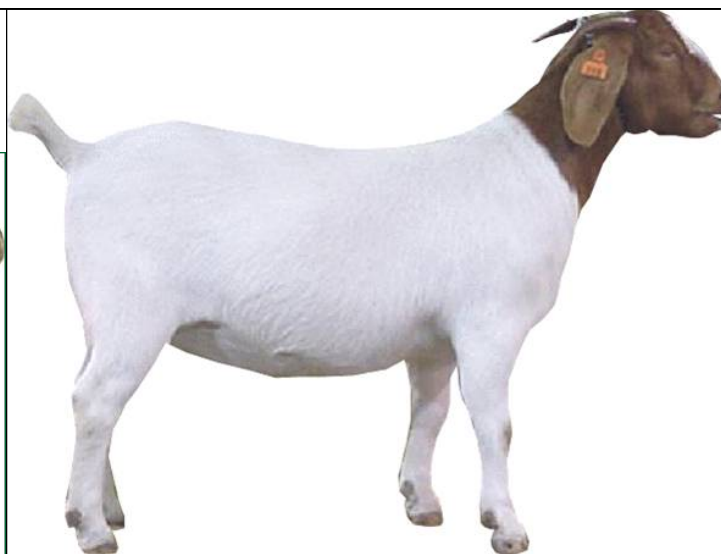


Doe A



Doe B

When analyzing the two does pictured above several differences can be seen. Goat A has a clear advantage in terms of depth of body and spring of rib. She is also longer sided and deeper flanked, giving her an advantage in total volume. From a muscle standpoint, goat A is larger through her leg and more expressive in her thigh, while tying deeper in her leg. Goat B is cleaner through her brisket and longer about her head and neck. From a structure standpoint, both goats are fairly sound, but Goat B is stronger on her rear pasterns and more correct through her knee.



Doe C



Goat D

In the two pictures above, we see two goats that are in stark contrast to one other. Goat C is well balanced, being opened up through her lower skeleton and deep and prominent in her rib. Analyzing her lines, she is fairly level from her chest to her flank with a deeper turn through her center rib, and she is nearly level in her top and out of her hip. She is heavy boned and stands down on a big foot. Her width and depth, along with the length and circumference of her head and neck are all proportionate to each other, giving her an extremely balanced look, and making her appear stylish.

Goat D is extremely long sided and very long through his neck and head; he is weak topped, steep hipped, and marginal in his muscle. He is also shallow bodied and when this is combined with his extreme length, it gives him an unbalanced look.



Goat E



Goat F

In the two pictures above, we can once again see quite a difference in the two goats. Goat E is wide based, wide through her lower skeleton, and wide from stifle to stifle. Goat E is also bolder sprung and has more width through her chest. In comparison, goat F is narrow based, narrow through her lower body, and very narrow from stifle to stifle. On the other hand, goat F stands squarer on her hind legs and is heavier boned. She is more correct in the toe placement on her front feet than goat E.



Goat G



Goat H



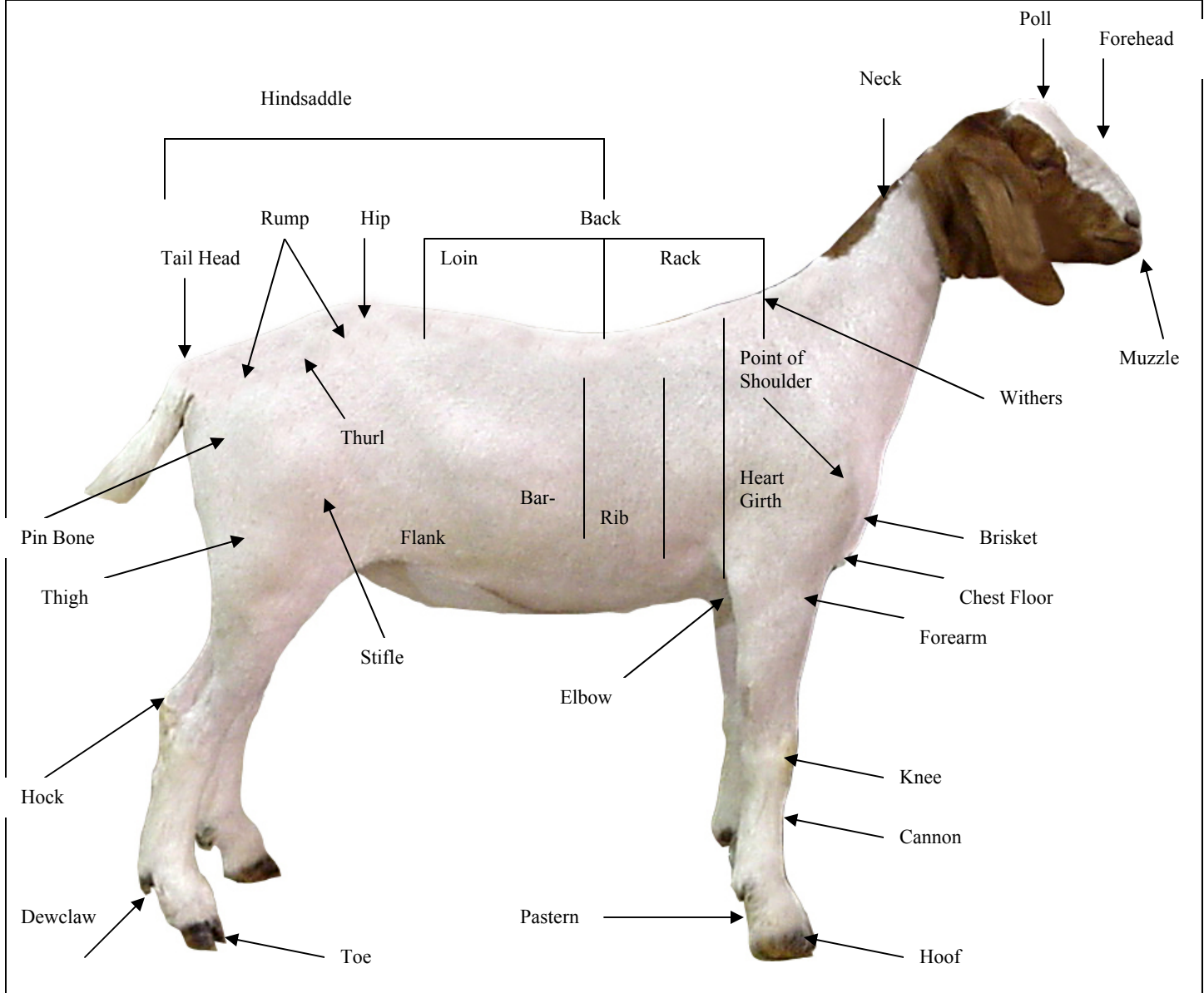
In these two pictures, we see a large difference in width of top. The goat on the left opens up wide right out of her rack and carries this width into a wider loin and hip. The goat to the right is sharp over her rack and narrow topped.



Looking at goat G and goat H we can see a large difference in structural correctness, especially on their feet and legs. Goat G is laid back correctly in his knee and is strong on his pasterns. He is correct in the set to his hock, adequate in his bone, strong on his pasterns, and correct in his toe placement. Goat G is also more nearly level down his top and out of his hip. Goat G comes out of his shoulders with a more correct neck placement.

Goat H is bucked over in his knee and toed out on his front end. Looking at his rear legs, Goat H has too much set to his hock and is down on his pasterns.

Parts of a Meat Goat



All Pictures Adapted From *Study Guide For Judging Meat Goats*, Kentucky Department of Agriculture

Terminology Adapted from the American Boer Goat Association Selection and Evaluation by Preston Faris and Dr. Frank Craddock

References

American Boer Goat Association Selection and Evaluation by Preston Faris and Dr. Frank Craddock
Judging Breeding Goats in Tennessee, Ricky C. Skillington, Central Region Goat Specialist, University of Tennessee Extension
Judging of Slaughter Meat Goats, Frank Craddock, Extension Sheep and Goat Specialist, San Angelo, Texas
Selecting Meat Goats, Melanie Barkley, Bedford County Extension Agent and Linda Spahr, York County Extension
 Showmeatgoats.com
Study Guide For Judging Meat Goats, Kentucky Department of Agriculture

Sample Reasons

Breeding Does

I ranked the breeding does 2-1-3-4. I started with the two powerfully constructed, high volumed does of the class. Of the pair, I prefer 2's balance and attractiveness to place her over 1.

The black headed doe is longer bodied and longer through her head and neck. When viewed from the side, she is more correctly balanced, being especially deeper in her flank and rear rib. As an added bonus she is longer and freer striding. The 1 doe certainly shows more volume of muscle through her lower and outer leg, yet she is more masculine in her look, having a coarser head and neck.

Nevertheless, 1's advantages in capacity and muscle places her over 3. The red kneed doe is especially wider through her chest and lower skeleton and shows a more prominent turn to a deeper rib. At the same time, she is the meatier topped doe that is wider through her hip and leg, while also exhibiting a more powerful forearm. I understand 3 stands squarer off of her hind legs, but she is flat ribbed and tapers through her hip and leg.

Even so, 3's structural correctness sorts her over four in my final pair. The red legged doe is more nearly level down her top and out of her hip. She blends smoother through her neck-shoulder junction. When set in motion, 3 is the truer tracking doe that is stronger on her pasterns. Recognizing that 4 is a wider made doe, I still marked her fourth as she is weak on her pasterns and easy in her top.

Resources

American Boer Goat Association

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1207 S. Bryant Blvd, Suite C.
San Angelo, Tx 76903
Ph: 325-486-2242
E-Mail: info@abga.org

International Boer Goat Association

www.internationalboergoat.org
P.O. Box 1045
Whitewright, TX 75491
Ph: 877-402-4242
E-Mail: intlboer@intlboergoat.org

The American Meat Goat Association

www.meatgoats.com
P.O. Box 676
Sonora, Tx 76950
Ph: 325-387-6100

University of Tennessee Extension

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2621 Morgan Circle
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Penn State Extension, Bedford County

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Show Meat Goats

www.showmeatgoats.com

Colorado State University Livestock Extension

www.livestock.colostate.edu