

How to Cull

by Marilyn Grossman

There's that dreaded word ... cull ... "to select the superior and eliminate the inferior". This is one of the most difficult management tasks we undertake as breeders. How do we make these decisions?

First, and foremost, choose the number of animals that you wish to maintain, then force yourself to stick to that number. How much barn work fits comfortably into your lifestyle? How much grain and hay can you afford to buy? At what number of goats does goatkeeping turn from pleasure into work and financial hardship? The most common mistake made by goatkeepers is to have more goats than they can properly feed and care for.

Define your purpose with your goat herd. Will you emphasize milk or show in your herd? DHI records, one day test scores, linear appraisal records, and show records can help you to decide which does will fulfill your purpose.

How much milk does your household or business need? A doe with a level lactation would serve you better than a high producer with an early peak in lactation that leaves you drowning in milk in the summer and not a drop in the winter. For those who hand milk, large orifices and teat size that fits your hand can make milking a pleasure rather than work.

What kinds of things are important to you? I cull for personality. I can't stand a bully, nor do I wish to deal with a goat who won't stand up for herself. It takes up too much of my time. If a doe is habitually annoying for any reason, she goes. I want my time in the barn to be the pleasure I intended it to be. Do you have a goat who has chronic health issues? Consider the high cost of vet bills and medications, in addition to the time and stress involved in her care.

Regardless of your reasons for keeping goats, learn to study type. Seek the traits which are necessary for a strong, long-lived goat. A goat with correct feet and legs will be able to get around even when she's old. A wide chest makes for heart and lung capacity enabling her to function without over-stressing her body. Withers that are higher than the rump keep the weight of the organs and stomach off the heart and the lungs. A wide muzzle and deep jaw give the goat lots of eating capacity to furnish her body with fuel. A well attached udder can keep that udder up out of harm's way, reducing udder injuries and mastitis.

Whatever you choose as your number of goats and your criteria for culling, the key to herd improvement is to select your criteria and then stick to it. Make your list in the house where you can work with numbers and statistics, not in the barn where your heart will decide. I make a chart for my decision making. I list all of my does down the left side and then list the traits I desire across the top. I give points for each trait, and then rank my does by the number of points they've earned. Then I sell the does who received the fewest points.

I do allow myself a couple of old retired does that have no purpose other than to be my friend. But, in order to keep them, I make other concessions. I have fewer younger, productive does to make room for the old girls. After all, I can only trim so many feet, and buy so much feed. I limit myself to eight milkers, as that is as many as I want to milk in a day. I limit myself to freshening twelve does per kidding season. Six kids is the highest number of kids I allow myself to keep to raise each season. My buck house can hold four bucks. If I want a new buck, one of the four must go to make room for the new guy. These are the numbers that make goatkeeping a pleasant experience for me.

However painful the decisions may be, I make myself stick to "The Plan". In the long run, I spend less money, less time working, and more time enjoying my goats.