

WHY WE DON'T USE BREED STANDARDS

One common question is “where are the New Zealand breed standards for KIKO and KIKONU goats?” The answer is that there are none in the manner expected, such as used by Breed Societies. So the next question is “why not?” Unfortunately each goat breed society has its own breed standards and they are not identical, so what is acceptable to some is not acceptable to others.

The objective of breed standards should be to maximise economic value. A commercial farmer wants lots of kids to grow quickly and later to produce lots of meat at low cost. A pastoral goat used for biological weed control and pasture improvement has other specific characteristics too. Breed standards should help select and improve those factors.

A close examination of meat goat breed standards suggests a lack of scientific and objective study on which to base them. They frequently use unhelpful wording, such as “too...”, often in relation to physical points such as legs or neck. Consequently judgment must use discretion, reflect personal choice and cause arguments with no fact foundation. Facts are known and have been adequately demonstrated to be “true” as arrived at by scientific method. Insufficient evidence is a basis for “belief”, and you can believe anything.

A trait defect should be any factor that inhibits the animal from achieving its purpose and its productivity. If it has no bad effect on that, why should it be a breed standard. Body standards are both loosely defined and of questionable value. Do loose shoulders or a flat backline actually contribute to meat production or ability to graze. Logic suggests that it should only be factors that enable the goat to walk long distances daily, and have body capacity to eat enough and to carry necessary organs. Pastoral goats' body shape that favours a sloped back and udder well off the ground can have an actual production merit. Does a wide-chested animal produce more meat with more internal organs? There seems to be no real correlation between these discretionary breed standards and growth rate. And how heritable are they anyway? Even critical points such as jaw/teeth that are highly heritable can be qualified by degree of difference. As an aside, but for extra confusion, goats on hard feed do not need the same jaw/teeth excellence as pastoral goats.

When it comes to feeding kids, there are some notable differences between breed standards for number of teats allowed, functionality and placement. Either the doe can feed her kids adequately or she cannot. While logic can connect scrotum shape and split with udder attachments and perhaps inheritance, there is no research evidence to confirm that.

Appearance standards also have no direct profitability benefit, even if they define what a good example of the breed should look like, and help to distinguish it from other breeds. Hardly a culling factor for production profitability, although eye-appeal to an individual is important to all farmers. The acceptance and even premium for coloured Kiko and Boer goats

in USA as distinguished from the earlier standards is a classic example of changing popularity, but is not reflected in added meat production or value in a pastoral role.

KIKO and KIKONUI goats are bred for specific purposes and selection is based on those factors, not on interpretation of earlier standards developed to reflect someone's personal opinions about what an animal should look like, and then modified to allow for variations based on more personal opinions. As with most farm products and profit, decisions must start at the market end and work back to the animals that produce what is required.

Our pastoral goats are evaluated on bottom line profit from meat income, pasture enhancement and biological weed control. Their development is based on all three, but can be used on individual farms for either or all of those specific purposes. The prime selection criteria is weight of kids weaned as a % of doe weight, so does must be able to produce and rear lots of kids. Subsequent growth rates and lifetime performance are other factors, as are minimised husbandry and management cost including labour.