

Buyer Beware; A Short Guide to Better Buying and Selling Dairy Goats

Whether you have been breeding goats for 50 years or five minutes this article could be of use to you. Before some of you roll your eyes allow me the chance to get your ear. Breeding programs, especially intensive ones involving highly sought after genetics, eventually require an outside purchase to be made to move the herd in a desired direction or prevent undesirable levels of inbreeding. One spends hours poring over the internet examining pedigrees and photos, traveling to shows, chatting with goat pals and other breeders in search of the best fit for your plans. If you are lucky enough you are able to obtain what it is you are looking for. But what if your new purchase comes with a surprise or two? This article is about purchasing new animals for your herd and how to a \$1500 investment can turn into a \$50 return should things not go to plan.

There are no guarantees in genetics, but we can 'stack the deck' so to speak by being good selectors as breeders. Other factors can influence the fruits of our labors as well, namely management. An animal that could have all the genetic potential in the world could look like something saved from the sale barn due to poor management. No one likes to purchase and ship an expensive buck to their farm only to find that he is severely underweight/sized and unable to pass a breeding soundness exam. Disease is also a large contributing factor for multiple reasons. There are a variety of diseases that are both difficult to maintain as well as expensive due to added to rearing costs and profit losses- not to mention they affect the value of the animal (assuming the purchaser knows the animal is diseased). Knowing these things we wouldn't knowingly raise, sell or purchase such animals would we? Well, only in a perfect world, not all goat producers have the same view of herd health or the same goals in mind. Selling of goats with a variety of ailments happens regularly and evidence of such is often pasted on numerous social media sites and gossiped about at goat social events.

As breeders we all have some unspoken responsibility to maintain and uphold own reputations. ADGA does offer a code of conduct but it is largely up to its members to uphold and police themselves. It amazes how many short sighted individuals neglect to show all of their disease testing results, offer less than accurate photos/descriptions of sale stock or even sell known dead semen or semen that has no collection date that needs one. Unsuspecting purchasers left with undesirable merchandise while the checks are cashed. Some of you who have been at this a while are rolling your eyes right now and this writer might have been among you had they not been schooled a time or two resulting in the loss of almost the entire herd and a small fortune in expenses. Anyone can be conned.

So at this point some of you may be asking, "How do I avoid these sort of situations?" Excellent question. Step one- ask lots of questions and know what questions to ask. Knowing what you don't know is wisdom but ignorance is bliss. This statement has become this reader's mantra. If someone cannot give a yes or no answer to a yes or no question, run. Run far, far away and take your money with you. Do not be fooled by those who say, "trust me I'm honest", however much one may want to be the eternal optimist. That should be red flag number one. People with something to hide will often use lots of words to skirt the issue at hand. Asking blunt questions about extra teats, undershot jaws or cleft palates for example can be good talking points. Both parties will generally respect each other for disclosure of such information rather than ridicule them later after an affected kid crop is born sporting the evidence. In business communication, be upfront, honest, direct and clear. Be as specific in your questions as you can, it could save you a small fortune and a lot of heart ache. If you are looking for a new purchase to be free of a said disease, say CAE, an important question might be, "Do you raise your herd on strict CAE prevention". Some of us are satisfied with a yes answer, however what CAE prevention may mean to that individual is feeding raw colostrum followed by heat treated milk (this is not CAE prevention by definition). The seller isn't lying- but it's these sorts of areas where ignorance becomes dangerous and can result in unhappy individuals. Another example might be that you are looking at a yearling buck online, he looks great in the photos and the buyer writes a glowing descriptions listing the attributes of the buck, but you count the squares on the livestock panel pictured behind him and he is only as tall as 4 of them, might be a good idea to ask how tall and what he weights- he might not be as great as the photo suggests or the sellers believe. Conducting your business communications in writing is

highly recommended. Being able to look back at black and white writing avoids some discrepancies and misunderstandings.

The answers to your questions will only be as good as the person answering them. This is where asking for third party evidence is helpful in sorting out the details on a new purchase prospect. What if you get a little more specific and ask for things like testing results? Good idea; however there are some common pitfalls to that as well. The results are going to only be as good as the person drawing the blood, the lab used and the computer editing skills of the person showing you the paperwork. For those of you unaware, some lab's reporting results can be edited easily with a few clicks of the mouse on any home computer, there is also good old fashioned copy/paste and photo shop for the more dedicated. Blood shipped USPS in July from warmer parts of the country not packaged properly will bake and yield less than accurate results. Timing of testing can influence results. Some herds only spot check certain animals. Others avoid the truth all together or see no value in testing for some or all communicable diseases. It is important to find sellers who match what you are looking for.

This leads to rule number two, check the facts and double check them. As expensive and annoying as veterinary examinations and health certificates may be for pre-purchases are, get them done. If you are purchasing a new animal from the opposite coast it is a good idea to make sure it is healthy enough to make the trip to you and it is also a bonus not to violate federal regulations and bring in non endemic diseases to your home area. Your fellow producers and veterinarians will thank you for your sense of responsibility. They will not thank you for bringing in air borne Q Fever. Get all of your desired testing done BEFORE the animal leaves the seller's farm and have them done by a veterinarian who reads and checks the tattoos or USDA tags against the registration papers. When the animal arrives, put them in quarantine and have your veterinarian run your desired tests again. If an issue arises, legally binding documentation will be available for both parties. Diseases like CAE take a minimum of 3 weeks post exposure to see seroconversion (test positive), strange things can happen and the more precautions that are taken to avoid an issue will minimize damages.

The third rule is protect thy self. Buyers and sellers can benefit from designing and signing contracts with every sale. No one likes unpleasant surprises. The more that is outlined in the contract the less open to misunderstandings and interpretations that could come up later. Purchasing an animal sight unseen is risky in its own right but providing a well thought out contract is a good way for buyer and seller to be on the same page and have some assurance. Good contracts provide up to date contact details for both parties, a detailed description of the animal or item being sold, copies and references to any testing or examinations and clauses pertaining to the agreed upon expectations of the buyer and seller. These sorts of contracts could also follow deposits. No one likes sending or receiving a deposit and not knowing if it will be fulfilled by either party. Having two uninvolved witnesses sign any contract is beneficial when available for larger purchases and sales. If an individual is unwilling to create, sign or adhere to a contract, walk away. That is a sure sign that individual is not a good match for you to do business with. As frustrating as it may be, as much as you may want buck A or kid B, chances are they are not what you perceive them to be and will cost you something you didn't intend them to in the long run.

It is not safe to assume the law will protect you. Even with proper documentation and your feelings about who is in the right or wrong, small claims courts are not generally worthwhile, especially if you are crossing state lines. Even with a winning verdict, enforcement and collection of debts owed becomes another costly venture often adding more trauma and drama to an already bad situation.

In summary, we all need to be on the same page when it comes to buying and selling. The dairy goat industry is continually growing and with increased sales opportunities, animal movement and varying levels of education on these subjects it is important we all do our part to remain responsible. The bumper kid sold to the unsuspecting 4Her today could cost the sale price of a high genetic merit spotlight sale consignment of the future due to poor reputation. Think ahead and buy/sell responsibly. Happy breeding!