

National Goat Expo Study Tour

Bloomington, Illinois, USA



26th – 29th September 2013

Cian Condon M.Agr.Sc. M.Sc.(Agr.)

The 2nd Annual National Goat Expo took place in Bloomington, Illinois on September 26th-30th last and I was lucky enough to be given permission to attend. The Expo consisted of a huge number of shows and included a substantial educational element with seminars, clinics and classes. There were also representations from all major goat organisations and vendors.

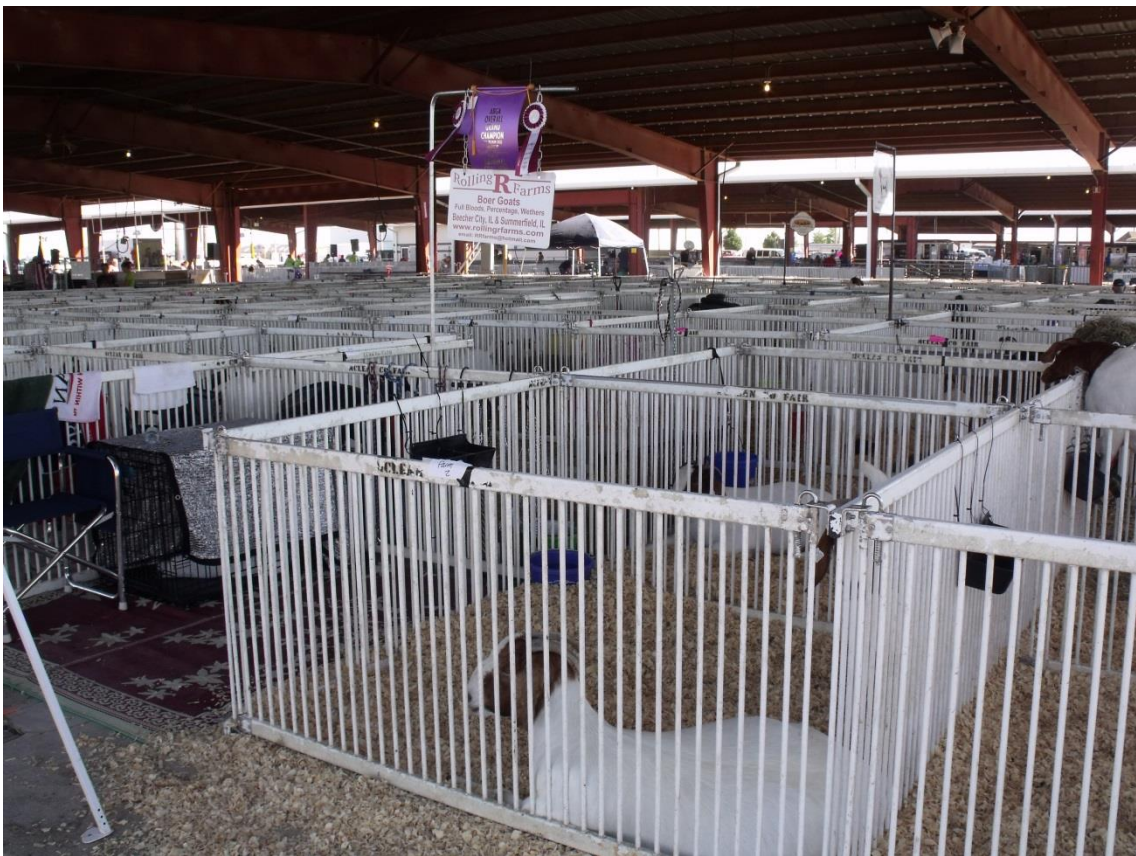


Figure 1. A view over just some of the penned area for goats at the Expo.

SEMINARS

Day 1

The first day there were only a few shows taking place and the major emphasis was on education. Deborah Niemann is a homesteader, writer and self-sufficiency expert who has been raising livestock and making goats' cheese for over 10 years. She conducted 3 seminars on the first day based on her experience and expertise. These primarily focussed on the range of value-added products that can be made from dairy goats. Deborah outlined the basics of making cheese from goats' milk and the equipment required. This can vary from the very simple such as ricotta using just a large saucepan or 'gallon pot' to the more complex aged or mould-ripened cheeses which can also need cheese cloths, moulds (for shaping), cultures (e.g. penecillium), pressure gauges and a 'cave' for aging.

She also detailed the equipment, process and ingredients for soap making. Goats' milk and caprillic acid are extremely good for your skin and are used in the treatment of skin conditions such as eczema. Many things can be added to goats' milk soap and Deborah described many of these and their uses. These include essential oils, herbs, clays and oatmeal.

Deborah also covered the production of meat, the tanning of hides and production of leather goods. There was also reference made to the whey left over from cheese production and its use as a feed for pigs and as a fertiliser.

Dr. Steve Hart has spent over 20 years in the E (Kika) de la Garza American Institute for Goat Research located at Langston University in Oklahoma. He made a number of presentations over the three days of seminars; the first of which was a basic introduction to goats dubbed 'Goats 101'. This was an excellent introduction to goat farming and covered all important aspects to be considered when beginning a goat enterprise. This included sources of information, types of goats and farms, parasites, infrastructure, health and how to budget and plan for beginning a goat enterprise.

Dr. Hart's second presentation was on parasites. The major parasite of concern to goat farmers in the USA is the Barber Pole Worm (so called due to its markings). This is of no significance to us here in Ireland. However he also covered many other more familiar parasites such as Fluke, Ostertagia and Nematodirus. A number of diagnostic methods were covered including FAMACHA. This is a method developed in South Africa to indicate anaemia by comparing the colour of the mucous membrane of the lower eyelid to a chart. There are 5 colour levels from red (healthy) to white (severely anaemic). He also covered control programmes and anthelmintic resistance.

Dr. Frank Pinkerton retired in 1993 after a 40-year university career, the last 15 of which focussed on goats for milk, meat and fibre. He still works as a private consultant in goat management and marketing and writes articles for Goat Rancher magazine. He also presented a number of seminars over the 3 days, primarily based on meat goats. The first of which was Management Influences Affecting Net Farm Income. This concentrated on the Break-Even Price per pound (being in the USA) and the factors (primarily reproductive efficiency and cost of doe maintenance) which affect it. He then gave examples of where efficiencies can be improved and how this affects the bottom line per doe.

Day 2

The second day began with a seminar from Dr. Hart about Nutrition and Minerals. This began with exploring each class of nutrient, why it is important in goat nutrition and any important information on each class. Dr. Hart also covered macro and trace minerals in some detail; their importance, levels in the diet and conditions resulting from deficiencies and toxicities. Finally there was a short section on feed costs.

Dr. Donald Bliss is the owner and operator of Mid America Ag Research, an agricultural and research management consultant company. They specialise in drug development and applied research with primary emphasis on parasitology investigations. Dr. Bliss gave an excellent presentation on parasites in goats, how they pick up parasites and how treatments might differ from other farm animals. He also discussed parasite life cycles, control programmes and strategic deworming programmes. Many of these documents are available through www.midamericaagresearch.net.

Dr. Hart then returned for a more detailed seminar on Nutrition for High-Yielding Dairy Does. This covered similar material to the earlier lecture but also went into detail on the factors that affect milk production, the different lactation periods, providing the necessary elements of feed and ration formulation. There is also an excellent online calculator available on the Langston website at <http://www2.luresext.edu/goats/research/nutritionmodule1.htm>.

Towards the end of the evening I attended a Question and Answer session held by the American Goat Federation (www.americangoatfederation.org), covering all producer concerns related to goats.

Day 3

The last day of seminars began with Dr. Pinkerton giving a presentation on Meat Goat Producer Problems and Constraints. Much of the discussion was based on the findings of a survey carried out during 2011 and 2012, which queried the effects of 11 potential challenges faced by meat goat producers. The highest ranking challenges are similar to what they might be had the survey been carried out in Ireland: internal parasites; lack of a clear marketing system; lack of a local goat meat processor; high cost of production and insufficient government support for the industry.

Dr. Hart gave a presentation on pasture management and grazing. Although much of this information was very interesting it was of little practical relevance in Ireland. The plant species present in swards in the USA are almost entirely absent in this part of the world. Much of the grazing is carried out in a very extensive manner in dry climates that are simply not applicable here. It was, however, interesting to learn of city and municipal councils around the USA that are paying farmers to keep land free of scrub in urban areas.

Leslie Cooperband of Prairie Fruits Farm (www.prairiefruits.com) gave two presentations on setting up a farmstead creamery and cheese making. She gave a detailed seminar on her own experience in setting up a dairy and cheese production unit, from 4 goats up to their present number in excess of 70. Although the exact legislation on establishing and running a food production system would be different to in Ireland, Leslie's experiences and recommendations would be hugely valuable to anyone setting up a food business, regardless of which country they live in. They currently make 8 different cheeses on the farm and Leslie went through the process of making

some of these. She was also kind enough to bring some of the cheeses with her for a tasting at the end of the seminars.

The final speaker on day 3 was Dr. Noah Litherland of the University of Minnesota. He gave two very detailed seminars, the first of which was on Successful Kid Rearing Practices. This was an excellent presentation with a huge amount of information covering the different phases of rearing up to weaning, the importance of colostrum and feeding. The final seminar was again very detailed and was on Managing Nutrition of Does during Late Pregnancy and Early Lactation. Dr. Litherland covered topics such as effects of prepartum feeding on postpartum performance, ketosis, rumen health, milk fever and uterine health.

SHOWS

There was a large variety of goat breeds present at the Expo. Each of the individual breeds had a number of competitions for different classes and ages of animal. There was also a large number of other competitions including dairy (see photo below), meat, fibre, miniature and myotonic. It was also lovely to watch the 'Pee Wee Showman' competitions, where even very young children are encouraged to show their animals.



Figure 2. A selection of the dairy breeds present at the show.

A number of the breeds present of the Expo are relatively well known here in Ireland such as Saanen, Toggenburg, Alpine and Anglo-Nubian. However others either don't exist at all in Ireland or are present in only small numbers. Here are some examples:

La Mancha

This is a very distinctive dairy breed, easily recognized by their very short ears – ‘elf ears’. They are known for high yield and milk butterfat content.



Figure 3. La Mancha goats with easily recognisable ‘elf ears’.

Nigerian Dwarf

As its name would suggest this is a miniature goat breed with West African ancestry. Although short in stature it gives a surprisingly high yield of milk. The milk is also extremely high in butterfat (as much as 10%) and is therefore ideally suited to cheese and soap production.



Figure 4. A fine example of a Nigerian Dwarf buck.

Oberhasli

This is a form of Alpine goat, originally from Switzerland. They are known for their distinctive colouring and excellent temperament, along with high milk production.



Figure 5. A young Oberhasli goat.

Boer

From the physical stature of this breed it's clear to see that its primary purpose is meat production. Only a handful existed in Ireland up until recently but changes in our ethnic groups and subsequent increase in demand for goat meat has seen a steady increase in recent years. It is originally from South Africa, has a fast growth rate and excellent carcass qualities. This breed had the highest numbers shown at the Expo.



Figure 6. Boer males need a firm hand when being shown. Note the powerful build of the buck.

Pygmy

Originally from West Africa, this hardy breed is typically kept as a pet but can be used for milk production.



Figure 7. A Pygmy goat in the show ring.

Miniature Silky

This type of goat is bred for the quality of the coat and its miniature size. It was originally bred from the Tennessee Fainting Goat but other goat breeds have been added such as the Nigerian.



Figure 8. A fully groomed Miniature Silky.

Myotonic

When panicked, the legs of this goat freeze for about 10 seconds so that they are often known as the 'fainting goat'. Its rarity means it can be quite valuable but they were originally bred for meat production (easily understood when you look at the conformation of the animal below).



Figure 9. The Myotonic goat is highly suited to meat production, easily recognisable in the conformation of this fine example.

Cashmere

Immediately recognizable by their name, any goat that produces cashmere wool is referred to as a cashmere goat. Breed standards vary regionally even in the United States.



Figure 10. Cashmere goats are primarily used for fibre production.

DEMONSTRATIONS AND OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

As part of the Expo there were a number of demonstrations and clinics being carried out each day. FAMACHA (FAffa MAlan CHArt) is a diagnostic tool to help farmers diagnose parasite infection in small ruminants. The tool is a chart that matches eyelid colour to anemia levels, an indicator of parasite infection. Dr. Steve Hart of Langston University provided training and certification on this as part of the seminar series. Dr. Donald Bliss of Mid America Ag Research, in conjunction with his seminar on parasites, provided a faecal clinic with faecal counts being done on goats present at the show.



Figure 11. Expo President Jen Parrish (centre) giving a helping hand to a veterinary surgeon demonstrating correct stomach tubing practice to a group of Korean visitors.

One of the seminars I wasn't able to attend was regarding LGD's. At first I had no idea what LGD's were but I discovered they were Livestock Guardian Dogs. These dogs protect the goats from predators and are basically full members of the herd. They are introduced to the goats at just a few weeks of age so that the 'imprint' on the animals and the urge to protect is therefore instinctive. Despite their size they tend to be gentle and are often protective of children.



Figure 12. A large Spanish Mastiff sleeping in a pen with young kids.

On the final morning Crede Garriott gave two comprehensive 'Boer Fitting Clinics' on how to prepare your goats for the show ring. Over the course of the demonstration he outlined the many points to consider during preparation for a show, what judges will be looking for and demonstrated no end of skill in his work.



Figure 13. Crede Garriott demonstrating how to prepare a Boer goat for the show ring.

There were a number of commercial stands present at the Expo. Some were specifically aimed at goat farmers with a wide array of products for practical use. Others were laden with many different products demonstrating the versatility of goats for any size holding.



Figure 14. An array of cosmetics made from goats' milk.



Figure 15. Some of the clothing available made from goats' cashmere.

I would finally like to give my sincere thanks to Jen Parrish and all those I met at the Goat Expo. On a professional level it was a very valuable learning experience but it was wonderful to spend a few days with people so dedicated not only to their own animals, but to goats in general. To those who organised, ran and attended the event I wish you and your goats continued success.



Figure 16. They're patriotic about their goats around here!