

## **HOW TO BUY A PYGMY GOAT: Questions a Buyer Should Ask**

**By Maggie Leman**

### **How old is this goat?**

Kids should be at least 8 weeks old before weaning unless you are prepared to bottle feed. If you are going to bottle feed be sure the kid is well started on the bottle BEFORE you buy it. Starting a kid on a bottle once it has nursed naturally can be nearly impossible. We don't let kids go until they are 12 weeks old, and find they are more independent at this age and better able to handle the stress of weaning and going to a new home. Pygmy goats both male and female can be fertile as young as 12 weeks old; sexes should be separated at that age. Pygmy goats can live well into their teens and are usually productive (can safely have kids, or sire kids) until 9 or 10 years old.

### **What is this goat eating and how much?**

Kids should be eating grain and hay well before leaving their dam, not just nibbling. You should be prepared to supply the goat with their regular ration and hay as goats can suffer with severe stomach upsets when their feed is changed. If you need to change their diet, do it gradually over 7 to 10 days by mixing more and more of the new feed into the old at each feeding. Get enough feed and hay from the breeder to allow you to make any necessary feed changes.

### **Has this goat been vaccinated and treated for parasites?**

Ask about the goat's vaccination and deworming history and what the breeder suggests as a good schedule for you to follow. Goats should be vaccinated against clostridial diseases with a vaccine approved for goats (CDT vaccine) and should be started on a parasite control program by the time they are 10 weeks old. Ask the breeder to give you a written record for your goat.

### **Is this herd tested yearly for diseases?**

Ask about herd testing for diseases such as CAE, TB, brucellosis, caseous lymphadenitis, and Johne's disease. Some herds do not test for these diseases and have no idea of their herd's status. These are serious life threatening diseases that may not show up for weeks or even years and are difficult (if not impossible) to cure once they do show up. Some of them are very contagious to other goats and can even stay in the environment for years waiting to infect the next goat. Some are contagious to humans. Many show herds test for these diseases and buying from one of these breeders may help insure you are buying a healthy pet. It will cost you less in the long run even if you have to pay more initially.

### **Can you teach me about hoof trimming?**

Goats need to have their hooves trimmed every 8 weeks or so. It's an easy procedure and one any goat breeder should be familiar with and able to help a new goat owner learn.

### **Who should I use as a vet?**

If you live in the area ask who the breeder uses. This vet will be familiar with the herd your goat came from and best able to help you with your new goat. It is always good to know of a vet in your area that treats goats before you need their services. Not many vets treat goats and finding one during an emergency may not be possible.

### **Is this goat registered?**

With a registered animal you are sure of what you are getting, a real pygmy goat. A year down the road your pet wether will still be one of those cute little goats, not a tall 200 pound grade dairy goat wether. That big boy may still be lovable but not what you thought you were getting.

### **If you are buying a goat for use as a breeding animal, is fertility guaranteed?**

Ask about the goat's breeding and kidding history. Registered pygmy does that have produced a live kid should have a progeny sticker on their papers attesting to this. Ask about any kidding difficulties such as C-sections. If the doe is being sold as bred, most breeders will offer a return visit if the doe turns up open (not pregnant). Ask how many does the buck you are buying

settled (bred successfully) last year. If you are buying a kid as potential breeding stock ask what kind of guarantee for fertility the breeder offers. Get it in writing.

**If you are buying a show goat, does the goat have a show record? Does the goat have faults that may affect its show career?**

No goat is perfect so check for faults such as over or underbite, extra, bifurcal, or blind teats, cryptorchidism (undescended testicles), Roman nose or crooked face, weak or lacking breed markings, and genetic hornlessness. Some of these faults can disqualify the goat from competition. You should check the goat for yourself. Familiarize yourself with the pygmy goat standard and try to attend some shows before spending a lot of money.

**What a Seller Should Ask the New Owner**

- Are there zoning restrictions against livestock where you live?
- What are you going to use this goat for? Pet? Show? Breeding?
- Will this goat have adequate shelter and a secure pen?
- Are you prepared to provide this goat a companion?
- Do you know how to feed a bottle baby? Do you have the right equipment, formula and enough time?
- Have you purchased feed and hay and do you have a good supplier?
- Are you prepared to store enough hay for winter?
- Can you do hoof trims and vaccinations?
- Do you have a vet who is familiar with pygmy goats?
- Would you like to join the local goat club and the National Pygmy Goat Association?