Goat Assessment
Uniform Production Standards

Goats are assessed on a balancing test, the purpose of which is to help identify healthy, low-maintenance working animals with high reproductive success.

Assessment is pursuant to the following objectives:
- general health of the animal;
- indications of ability to feed herself with minimum care needs met and minimal support;
- indications of low risk profile for veterinary intervention;
- indications of high likelihood of successful conception, gestation, kidding, and raising of kids;
- ability of animal to contribute to health of the herd;
- productive capacity, whether milk, meat, fiber, or land management as applicable.

Assessment reflects international standards with consideration given to indicators of individual health, herd health, and production.

The following standards apply to all working breeds of goat with specific attention then paid to breed characteristics. Assessment is a balancing test rather than a point system with greater ordinal emphasis by tier and consideration given to the following criteria:

Tier one:

Barrel should be held high as appropriate to age. In older breeding does and immediately post-partum, barrel may be held lower but should not dangle. Barrel should offer significant digestive and reproductive capacity. It may be symmetrical or protrude farther on the left at the rumen in animals who are not pregnant, and should be taut and malleable rather than hard.

Ridgeline should be straight running from withers to hips, ideally parallel to ground or rising slightly from hips to withers if standing with rear legs extended. Muscles at withers and rump may interrupt this line depending on posture and muscular development. Animals seven years of age or older may have slightly bowed backs.

Escutcheons should be vaulted with significant space for lateral udder attachment and ease of kidding.

Mitty (top), from Hobbyfokkerij van Dwerggeiten in Belgium, and Ruby (bottom), from Five Rooster Farm in Vermont. These are mature does who would receive full marks in a show, leaving placement to behavior and presentation on the specific day and the judge's preference. Production standards have the purpose of leading us to these animals, who have given birth, raised kids, and produced milk in multiple years. When we assess younger animals, it is in the hope they will achieve the potential these does have fulfilled. Both show good examples of the "swept" horn set, with horns symmetrical, spaced, and clean.

Udder should be symmetrical and tightly attached as appropriate to age with the majority of the udder between or in front of the legs and minimal protrusion behind. No portion of the udder should extend backward beyond the vulva.

Pasterns should be elastic in gait, facilitating ease of movement including jumping and climbing. Goat should stand high on pasterns in relaxed posture.

Condition should be appropriate to stage in breeding cycle, including skin, eyes, hooves, musculature, hoof walls, hair, underfur if appropriate to breed and time of year, etc.

Body should be constructed in proportion to itself with sufficient musculature to support differing acceptable body types. Appropriate body types may vary significantly even within a breed or herd, but the body should be in balance.

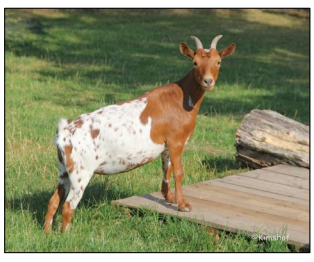
Movement should be fluid and easy, including at trot and canter and in rearing position if circumstances allow.

Horns should be symmetrical, indicative of health, and appropriate to stage of life. Horn girth and curvature should be appropriate to breed but should not curve inward or forward (except as later stage of a backward horn curve). Horns should be spaced apart from one another such that the goat may reach her scent glands without assistance and may be ovular or triangular in cross section. Swept and clubbed horns are equally acceptable early in development and in wethers; in mature does, swept horns are favored and may extend straight back or flare to sides.

Disposition should be alert and curious. Animals should be spirited and physical, and should demonstrate ease of movement in different gaits. Recognizing that for many working animals, a show ring is an alien environment, confidence and assertiveness are nonetheless favored as indications an animal may possess leadership qualities within a herd. This may extend to tense or uncooperative animals if an assessment of the animal's conformation may be made. However, behavior preventing proper assessment will be faulted and overly disruptive behavior will result in an animal's removal.

Maggi and Liesl, from Meckerstube in Austria, rearing while in milk. Their udders are tightly attached and, in bipedal position, extend forward rather than hanging down or protruding backward to obstruct their movement.

Fritz, from Hof ter Berbroek in Belgium, displaying "clubbed" horns. In young goats and wethers, horns may be thick at the base and either narrow to triangles or continue out or back with lesser diameter, yielding a conical appearance.



Left: Nigiri, mature doe from Kimshof Hobbyfokkerij van Dwerggeiten in Belgium. In relaxed posture or on uneven ground, the doe may present a ridgeline that appears bowed or slanted. The same doe, on level ground or with front end elevated either by terrain or by extending rear legs back, will display the proper topline.

Tier two:

Frame should be of length sufficient for digestive and reproductive capacity. In otherwise similarly suited animals, longer frames may be desirable if animal remains in proportion.

Stature should be robust and appropriate to breed and stage of life. In otherwise similarly suited animals, larger frames are desirable.

Hocks should crook comfortably for square standing posture. Hocks may turn in slightly without fault, but excessive inward turn affecting gait, ridgeline, hip set, or udder carriage is a serious fault and outward oriented hocks are disqualifying.

Hoof orientation should result from hock set. Hooves may orient straight forward or angle slightly outward in relaxed posture. Excessively outward hoof orientation is a fault and pigeon-toed posture and hoof orientation not matching hock set are disqualifying.

Teat set should be even with teats extending down or slightly forward or outward. Sets and sizes inhibiting newborns from latching are disfavored.

Tier three:

Comfort with handler or handler skill should allow for assessment of animal. Fitting and handling are not part of animal assessment but may become obstructive.

Sole of hoof should be level and trimmed or abraded so the entire pad is in contact with the ground.

Tier four:

Tier four consists of breed and use-specific considerations.

Junior does at different stages of development. Junior does are sexually mature but not yet of breeding stature. The age at which they take on adult proportions varies by breed but is generally not until six to twelve months of age. From top to bottom: a pair of junior does from Kimshof Hobbyfokkerij van Dwerggeiten in Belgium at weaning age, Quincy Lilo of Kimshof Hobbyfokkerij van Dwerggeiten in Belgium at roughly four months of age, and Mia and Lagertha of Five Rooster Farm in Vermont at roughly five months of age. As age increases, the musculature and depth of barrel become more pronounced.
Bottom left and right: Spirit of Five Rooster Farm in Vermont shows the form of the junior doe late in development. This doe is nearly a yearling and is well muscled. With her legs extended and back flexed, she shows a strong topline, robust frame, ideal leg set, and vaulted escutcheons.

Grooming:

Grooming may make it easier to identify an animal's attributes, but does not directly contribute to assessment of the animal except in circumstances in which it affects animal health. While judge may comment on color for the public's benefit, color and pattern are not considerations. Similarly, judge may note wattles as a point of interest, but they are not part of assessment in their presence, absence, or placement.

Category faults:

Disbudded animals will produce horned offspring, so this is a lesser fault. A disbudded animal may win a class or the entire show, but will be at disadvantage relative to a similarly constructed animal with horns.

Polled animals have high rates of sterility and underdeveloped or absent scent glands, further affecting conception rates and kid care in fertile animals. Polling is a dominant genetic trait, meaning animals possessing the polled gene will be polled, so this is a more serious fault. Polled animals may win a class or show, but are at greater disadvantage than disbudded animals.

Skin, hoof, or other condition indicating health or nutrition inappropriate to stage of development and production cycle is a serious fault.

Parrot mouth is a serious fault in animals under seven years of age, a lesser fault in animals seven to eight, and a minor concern in animals of advanced age. Teeth should comfortably meet dental pad.

Mia of Five Rooster Farm in Vermont (left) and Venus of Elevage des Lutins D'Hoscas in France (right), both of whom will have sundgau coats as adults. Newborn kids have yet to develop their barrels and musculature. This is particularly evident in the rump.

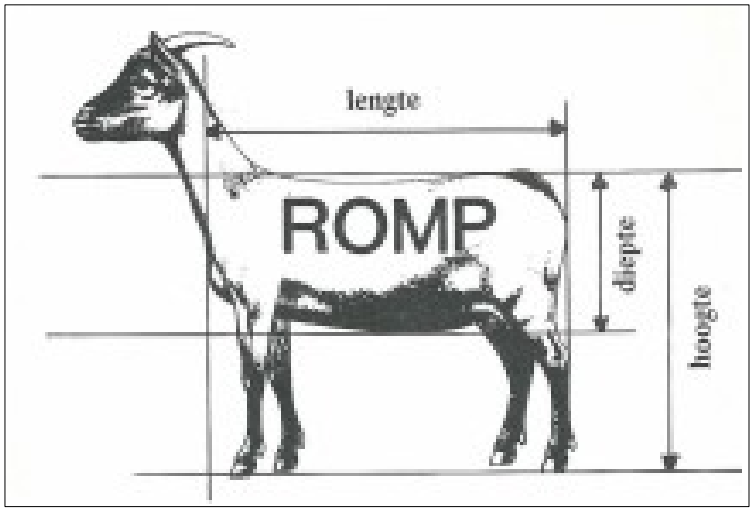
Kids from Hof ter Berbroek (left) and Kimshof Hobbyfokkerij van Dwerggeiten (right), both in Belgium. Kids quickly increase activity level, developing musculature such that posterior muscles develop rapidly and may be more developed than other muscles for a time.

Kid from Meckerstube in Austria (left) and Dakota of Rottaler Zwerge in Bavaria (right). Digestive and horn development are concurrent. Kids begin lipping solid food at the same time as their horn buds erupt and begin consuming solid food as a staple when the horns emerge as proper horns and become visible in short-haired breeds.

Left: Legolas of Five Rooster Farm in Vermont flexing while displaying proper form for a kid of two weeks of age. By two weeks, muscles begin to come back in proportion, though the process takes longer for some kids than others.

What does it mean for a goat's body to be in proportion?

Specific proportions are contingent on breed, but in all breeds, a goat's body is iterative and balanced. In this image from the Belgian Dwarf Goat Organisation, you can see the ideal of three equivalent rectangles created by the length of the goat's body and first, the height of the legs; second, the depth of the body; and third, the height of the head at full extension. Musculature, udder, horns, and girth then exist in relation to one another. A wider barrel or heavy horn set may result in more musculature in the withers and chest, where a narrower barrel may result in less musculature, producing the "cobby" or "lanky" body type respectively. This repeats throughout the body. When musculature is developed in balance to the different body shapes, the animal is proportional. Some goats, such as the alpine or La Mancha, may be more refined or slender; others, like the pygmy or pygora, may be stockier; but in all breeds, the individual animal should have a balanced body.



Belle (right), of Rottaler Zwerge Zwergziegen in Bavaria, a mature doe showing a robust barrel and heavy horn set. Hers is the "cobby" body type.

Holly (bottom left) and Maja (bottom right), both of Zwergziegen Vom Guenztal in Germany, are of considerably slighter build. Holly offers clubbed horns in a mature doe. All three are in proportion while showing different forms.

Does in Milk

Happy, milking doe from La Tribu Enana in Spain, shows a well-constructed goat udder. The udder is full and symmetrical with strong medial ligament attachment. Left teat is not visible, but teats appear to orient out and forward at angle conducive to nursing. Udder is tightly suspended. No portion extends back past the vulva, very little extends back past the legs, and it stops well short of the hocks.

Annie, also of La Tribu Enana, shows a considerably smaller udder. A smaller udder with clear separation of hemispheres is acceptable, and is preferable to a larger udder, even in dairy breeds. Such an udder may still be extremely productive from a dairy perspective and will not interfere with the active life of a healthy goat. Smaller udders are expected in non-dairy breeds such as the Boer and Pygora. In all breeds, the size of the udder is less important than its consistency and shape and the goat's ability to move normally while in milk.

Left: Effie, milking doe from Sunstone Orchard and Rabbitry in Vermont, showing a side view of a productive dairy udder. The teats are forward for ease of nursing and milking. The udder is close to the body with more forward than rear projection. The udder is capacious but does not extend past vulva or hocks and implies no incursion affecting gait. While this is a well-formed udder, the udder need not be so large and an udder noticeably larger than this would be disfavored.

Winter goats, right top and bottom. The herd at La Tribu Enana on the island of Ibiza in the Mediterranean Sea grazes on winter pasture. Dandaloo, mature doe from Five Rooster Farm in Vermont, gallops in snow while the thermometer reads twenty-five degrees below zero. Different breeds of goats may be more suitable to one climate or another, but well-constructed goats are adaptable and resilient. Nigerian dwarf goats like these can thrive in adverse weather conditions and extremes of heat and cold; assessment standards help identify resilience and adaptability in individual animals and help build it in herds.

References:

With appreciation, these standards are developed with reference to established standards and publications for many breeds and from several organizations. The most helpful of these were the Belgian Dwarf Goat Organisation and the International Goat Association. Sources include:

Belgian Dwarf Goat Organisation
British Dwarf Dairy Goat Society
British Goat Society
Dutch Federation of Dwarf Goat Associations
English Goat Breeders Association
Federal Association of German Goat Breeders
Heritage Dairy Goat Registry
International Goat Association
International Sheep, Goat, Camelid Registry
The Pygmy Goat Club
Swedish Goat Breeders' Association

This is a uniform assessment standard, but the plurality of goats at The Tunbridge Fair are dwarf goats of different varieties. As such, all illustrations in this document are of dwarf goats from different registries and countries. With appreciation, images are from the following herds:

Elevage des Lutins D'Hoscas (France)
Five Rooster Farm (Vermont)
Hof Ter Berbroek (Belgium)
Kimshof Hobbyfokkerij van Dwerggeiten (Belgium)
Du Maison de la Valeur (Netherlands)
Meckerstube (Austria)
Rottaler-Zwerge Zwergziegen (Bavaria)
Sunstone Orchard and Rabbitry (Vermont)
La Tribu Enana (Ibiza, Spain)
Zwergziegen Vom Guenztal (Germany)

Weaned does at different stages of development: Menolly, junior doe from Five Rooster Farm in Vermont (top); Pebbles, yearling doe from Kimshof Hobbyfokkerij van Dwerggeiten in Belgium (middle); Lisabelle Moon, mature doe with cobby body from Kimshof Hobbyfokkerij van Dwerggeiten in Belgium (bottom right); and Izzy Blue, mature doe with lanky body from Du Maison de la Valeur in the Netherlands (bottom left).