

Kikos a natural fit for eastern half of U.S.

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The Kiko breed of goat, long overshadowed by the popular and pretty Boer goat, is starting to make serious inroads into the meat goat industry. This growth in prominence is most notable in the Southeast and Midwest, where kids with Kiko influence can be seen at local meat goat sales on a regular basis. Kikos, however, still are a rare sight in the Texas Hill Country and points farther west, although a handful of producers are using Kiko bucks on their Spanish does to increase milk production and on Boer percentage does to tighten up udder problems.

Back east, producers have learned that Kikos can be raised in a hot and humid climate a lot easier than Boer goats can. It's not that there's anything fundamentally wrong with Boer goats, they just weren't made to thrive where pastures get 50-60 inches of rain a year and there are no rocks. Boers were bred up over the last 80 years in South Africa, where most of the country gets less than 20 inches of rain a year, about the same rainfall as San Angelo. You can raise Boer goats just about anywhere, but they really thrive in areas basically west of Interstate 35. A glance at the accompanying map puts it into stark perspective. East of Dallas, lots of rain — west of Dallas, very little rain. This difference in climate is why the Boer and Kiko perform so differently. The Kiko was developed from feral goats in New Zealand, where annual rainfall can run to more than 100 inches on both the South Island and North Island. Only the east coast of the South Island has a scarcity of rainfall. The development of the Kiko in this temperate climate with high humidity, soggy ground and parasites galore made it the perfect goat for places like Mississippi, for instance, where I have been raising them since 1997.

Like many folks I jumped on the Boer bandwagon early on. But it took me only one kidding season to realize I had to do something drastically different. First, I had to learn more about goats. And failing that, I had to find a goat that could survive my management — or lack thereof. In the summer of 1996 I launched *Goat Rancher* and hit the road promoting the new publication. One of my first stops was the American Boer Goat Association National Show, which was held in Tyler, Texas, that year. In addition to seeing my first real Boer goats, Jacques Valley of nearby Athens, Texas, had a booth set up promoting his Kiko goats. Jacques and his wife, Therese, were among the first serious producers and promoters of this New Zealand import. They were some of the first to advertise their Kikos in *Goat Rancher*, along with Steve and Sylvia Tomlinson of Caston Creek Ranch in Oklahoma, Frank and Mary Dyson of Robinson, Texas, and An Peischel of Goats Unlimited, which was located in northern California at the time. The more that I talked to these producers, the more interested I became in the Kiko, especially after I lost 24 Boer percentage kids and 10 does to parasites in one spring. So I began seeking more information on this new wonder goat.

In the March 1997 issue of *Goat Rancher*, I ran the first major article about Kikos. The cover story was an interview with Kiko importer Graham Culliford that was written by Sylvia Tomlinson, who by then had joined *Goat Rancher* as a monthly columnist. Later that year, I visited Frank and Mary Dyson's Sunset Place Kikos just outside of Waco, home of the famous bucks Money Maker and Generator. In the August 1997 *Goat Rancher* I published my article on Sunset Kikos — and that same year, my cousin and I went together and bought our first Kiko buck from the Dysons, a 1-year-old son of Moneymaker, for \$1,000.

Longtime *Goat Rancher* readers will remember my many articles about those first kids out of Sunboy III, or as we called him, King Tut. We still didn't know much about raising goats, so we just turned Tut out with a herd of black Spanish nannies. We didn't see much action during breeding season, but come the spring of 1998, we had little white kids running everywhere. My cousin, Joe, and I didn't know what to expect. We went to the pasture with our towels and Nutri-Drench, items we had needed the year before when little weak kids started dropping out of two dozen anemic mothers. This year was different, however. We couldn't catch the kids to give them the Nutri-Drench, so we finally decided they didn't really need it. We didn't find any weak, wet kids, so we just sat back and enjoyed watching the healthy kids play. We tried to catch the kids so we could eartag them and try to keep up with who was whom — which was becoming difficult since all the does were solid black and all the kids solid white. We couldn't even do that. We finally got the whole herd of mommas and babies into a catch-pen. We then tagged all the kids, not knowing who they belonged to. Then we turned them all loose, and over the next few days, we watched and took notes as we observed which kids nursed which moms.

Those first kids grew up with a bare minimum of attention, medication, deworming — and feed. We didn't lose a single kid that spring. They grazed all summer and we put out rolls of hay in the winter. There was no such thing as a sack of goat feed in Mississippi at that time, so we put out a few molasses tubs and range cubes made for cattle. Although I was still raising Boer goats, it was becoming apparent that with my work and travel schedule, Kikos were going to fit better in my ranching situation. So I started taking steps to increase my Kiko herd and moving from an unregistered meat goat operation to a registered breeding stock enterprise.

I got my first two purebred Kiko does from Jo Ann and Brinson Taylor of Valdosta, Ga., who, ironically, had first read about Kikos in the *Goat Rancher*. I added two more does from Jacques and Teri, another nanny with a doe kid from the Tomlinsons, and over the years I have purchased three does from Dr. An. These nine purebred Kiko does were so long-lived and prolific that every buck and doe on my farm and the dozens I have sold over the years, are descended from them. Plus I still have three of those original does on the ranch — two of An's does (ages 5 and 8) and one of Jacques', JTV Queen, a Klondike daughter who had her 9th birthday and a set of twins in April.

I still have several dozen Boer percentage does on the farm. They definitely are an example of survival of the fittest, although they do require regular deworming. They run with the Kikos, and some of them are the most aggressive browsers I have. It helps when a 200-pound nanny leans on a tree and the rest of the herd is able to join in the feast.

When we work our goats, we squeeze them into an alleyway where we can easily check their eyelids for signs of anemia. In most cases the Kikos and Kiko percentages score 1 to 2 on the FAMACHA chart throughout the summer. The Boer percentages consistently score higher. This dramatic difference in parasite resistance — or parasite tolerance — is the greatest benefit of the Kiko from an economic standpoint. It is costly and labor-intensive to deworm on a regular basis, plus it just creates a new generation of resistant parasites. The loss of life from parasite infestation has cost me thousands of dollars over the years. I have talked to many producers that have had experiences like I did trying to raise Boers outside their natural environment. You can do it, but you have to really work at it. If you have hardy Boers, hang onto them. I have settled on Kikos. Through my years of experience, they have

risen to the top of my list as the easiest goats to raise, the cheapest to maintain, and these days they sell for a whole lot more than my Boers ever did.