

Clipping Tips

BY NANCY NICKEL

Why would anyone want to spend hours each spring clipping dairy goats? The answer to this no doubt will vary with the pleasure and/or purpose derived from goat keeping. There are many reasons and several types of clipping procedures to follow for those who deem dairy goat clipping a worthy endeavor. First there is the dairy trim, then there is the body clip, maintenance trimming, and finally, the show clip.

Producers utilizing goats for dairy find a dairy trim aids in keeping udders clean and shed hair out of the milk. To dairy clip around the flank and on the fore udder as well as trim long hairs that may grow on the udder itself and on the teats, is a good practice to promote goat health as well as for cleanliness in the dairy.

We like to use an Oster A-5 clipper with a 10 blade for the body hairs. This includes the growth on the fore udder to the midline of the doe as far forward as her mid belly underneath and starting about four inches up the flank. This "neatening up" is done in the first few days after she freshens.

On the udder, the same Oster A-5 is used with a 20 blade. The entire udder area front and rear is clipped. When washed there is little hair left to hold dirt or bacteria. With a 20 blade there is little chance of nicking the skin, even on a doe showing displeasure with the process. There should be no cause for chafing or scraping as well, and the fresh trimmed doe will

appear well-groomed in working-girl attire.

We take extra care with pink skinned and white does when we trim, especially if the spring weather has turned warm and sunny. Goats can sunburn their udders. The earlier in the year they begin to be trimmed the less likely this is to happen here in Missouri, however, by April the doe yard is full of ladies basking in the spring sunshine, and the fair of skin will benefit with protection. A human sun block suitable for the beach works well on these gals and needs to be applied for only a few days.

When the weather stabilizes, in May by our mid-latitude calendar, it is an excellent use of one's time to body clip the entire adult herd. By this time of year the Nubians have usually shed out their downy cashmere undercoat making the job much easier. We almost always do the first clip through dirty hair, which is harder on the blades, but easier on the goats. For bodies and heads we like to use our large clippers to expedite the job. The clipper of choice is a Lister, which has been found to be light weight with little vibration and has the power to go through dirty hair. We were accustomed to using a Stewart Clipmaster, an excellent clipper for the work as well, but traded for the lighter Lister to favor Bruce's shoulder. The head is done with the Oster A-5 and for the legs, we favor a Wahl variable blade 10-15-20. This little clipper comes in two varieties—a two-tone gray and the sturdier model, a black with a little red lever to switch the blade length.

In 22 years of goat leg clipping we finally wore out the motor of a black one, even though it had been kicked to the concrete on several occasions and always did the spring clips with no regard to muddy conditions.

When we set out to clip the herd we are always careful to clip a group of goats all in one day. Goats are social animals and have a definite pecking order in the clan. For some reason the determination of who is who is based on a variety of things and seems to include color and hair length. When a doe returns to the group after a fresh full body trim her friends will not recognize her. This can result in a round of head bashing until the order is established once again. Trimming several all in one day allows the resettling of the order to be completed more quickly and will be less likely to disturb production.

The spring clip is likely to reveal skin difficulties that have been hiding in the thick coats all winter. It is not unusual to find lice or fungus on goats that have seemed perfectly healthy. Close clipped hair allows for treatment to reach the skin. We like each goat to get an iodine shampoo bath at least once a year. Those which have lice are powdered with Coral. Ridding the host of these difficulties promotes health and comfort which in return will yield greater production.

It is interesting to note some goats will have infestations and their close associates will have none. The same is true for fungus. We had a strain of brown goats that were likely to have difficulties with an unusually persis-

tent fungus on the skin of the lower leg. If they were clipped and bathed in lime sulfur solution, which is purchased as a horticulture spray intended for use on fungus on fruit trees, the fungus would go away. The shorter hair allowed the sun to penetrate to the skin, which I believe is very therapeutic. Our final fix to this pesky problem was genetic research. It was possible to determine what line was carrying this predisposition to skin fungus. Over the span of 25 years, we have bred away from it, no longer having the problem.

Maintenance clipping can be done anytime in the spring when the weather has settled. However, if one is planning to attend a show the calendar needs be consulted. White goats, black goats and Oberhasli require a slight regrowth to make the most of their brilliant colors. We clip them two weeks to 10 days in advance of the show. None of these colors show to their best advantage closely clipped when the skin can show through the hair. Oberhasli bay and black goats will take on a dusty faded look, as the skin is never as dark as the hair color. If we find that we have clipped too close for optimum regrowth which would show off the color to the best advantage, a baby oil rub will help remedy the difficulty. The oil must penetrate to the skin and be applied evenly. It is then buffed off with a soft rag. Our tack box contains liquid shoe polish in complimentary colors for use on little scars or areas where it becomes visible with a close clip that hair growth has been damaged. A smooth over-all appearance is the goal, so it is important not to present any visual distracters.

It is really important to provide white goats with sunscreen as they will sunburn. Sunburn from over exposure proceeds just as a human sunburn, with red sensitive skin. The hair will stand out, and in the recovery period the skin will be leathery and flaky. Sunburned goats also pick up additional dirt and are quite unshowable. Providing a stall in the barn is not the



GCH Nickel's Red Twig Odile 5* is a Nubian yearling with a well-groomed rear udder.

only solution to sunscreen. We like to use cornstarch brushed in to the skin and applied each morning at milking. It does the job nicely, is organic, washes out easily, and does not gather dirt as a human sunscreen would.

Show grooming takes precision to a new level. It affords the health benefits while providing the opportunity to highlight the animal's best features. To understand where to place the major emphasis in the process, we always look to the Dairy Goat Score card. Seventy percent of the points awarded may be enhanced by grooming. No doubt this is why it is done.

Thirty-five percent of the total score is awarded in General Appearance. The body is clipped with a 10 blade so the hair lies flat and close, showing a clean, distinct and graceful line. When we groom the topline we are careful not to skin the hair along the dorsal process making it appear more pronounced than it need be. By the same rule, we want the shoulders to lie flat and sharp. This area we might blend in with a 15 cutting the hair a bit closer. The withers are most desirable if they appear to be sharp and free of excess flesh. Leaving a slight ridge

of longer hair at the top of the withers will give this appearance and accentuate the up-hill slope of the entire top line. When changing blades, or when changing clippers, take care not to stop the clip at a natural joint or juncture. Leaving a clip line where the leg joins the body, or where the fore udder meets the belly can destroy the desired effect.

A long and graceful neck is indicative of dairy character. Necks can be done with a 15 blade, taking special care to blend well into the throat so no hair is left long enough to make a bulky ridge when the collar is pulled tight. In addition to a closer clip in this area before ring time we like to give a quick buffing with Show Sheen to add to the silky appearance of the skin and hair. Close clipped goats are always in a better position to show fine silky skin, an element of dairy character.

Enhancing the incurving nature of the thigh can be done at this time with a 15 blade and a little Show Sheen as well. You know you have done a good job in this area when the vein that runs laterally across the rear leg just above the hock is clearly visible.

Harvey Considine used to say, "Long tail...lot of milk." When we show clip we are sure to measure the switch on the end of the tail before trimming it. A rule of thumb for tail trimming is two fingers longer than the tailbone and two fingers of long hair growing on the tail. The switch at the end is cut off straight across and will fall open into a triangle-shaped puff at the very end. The rest of the tail, topside and bottom side, is clipped with a 10 blade for a neat and clean appearance. My feeling is that it is more advantageous to have a tail too long than to give a short and stubby appearance with a tail that has had its hair bobbed.

The next major category, and the other 35 percent of the score card, is the mammary system. Of these points, more are gained by a fabulous rear udder than any other portion. How to

best present a high wide escutcheon is easy—in theory. Simply allow the udder to fill to the point of capacity at which the judge will see it, then trim off all the fringe from the escutcheon with a 20 blade and the hair from the udder itself using a 50 blade. We like to close clip with a 20 blade over on to the legs about ¼ of an inch. This arch must be smoothly done and symmetrical when viewed directly from the rear. Enhancing what is naturally there is the goal, but if an over zealous trimmer strays too far on to the leg or too high above the escutcheon the effect becomes fake and all is lost. It is possible to expose one's faults if the thighs are thick or the udder does not fill up to the trim line. We get our best estimation of how high and how wide from observation of the udder and its capacity in the days before the show. The person who tends and milks that doe will have the best advice on how high to trim.

Trimming with a 50 blade is a surgical clip. It cleanly shaves the udder in an approximation of what we used to effect with shaving cream and razor. The advantage of the clipper preparation is less likelihood of nicking the skin and speed of operation.

Clipping the fore udder is once again taken under advisement from the milker. I know why we do this—to safeguard the milk from dirt and hair that might be brushed off into the milk—but I have always been unclear how far to clip and how short to clip it. Either no one else knows or they are reluctant to share a secret. My best estimate is to clip the fore udder and the belly as much or as little as will give you the maximum amount of visual punch. On a doe with a long smooth fore udder, be sure not to leave a clipper seam where the udder skin transfers into the belly hair.

Most does we have worked with will have a visual break there that one would be better not clipping than to accentuate. To trim a show goat in a dairy clip in this area with the major purpose of keeping milk clean may

not be to the best advantage of the day. After close examination we may leave a line of longer hair down the midline of the belly about two inches wide. This strip would have been trimmed earlier in the season when she first came fresh so it would not be long and unruly, but would have enough thickness to it to add a little possibility of presenting a smoother silhouette when viewed from the side and across the ring. The sides of the fore udder and the belly where it blends are clipped as usual.

In cases where the medial ligament is too deep in the cleft between the halves we leave a bit of hair on the bottom of the udder as well. If the division of the halves is less than ideal clip into the medial area while leaving a bit of hair on the bottom of each half.

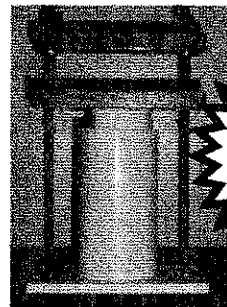
When the mammary system is completely groomed we like to wash it with an iodine shampoo and apply a sparse amount of light oil to blend in any flakiness. We like to ensure the evenness of the trim by running a line around the escutcheon with a eyebrow pencil or chalk to help set it off.

Sometimes a dark udder will show pink skin where the hair has occluded the sun. It is hard to understand that they suntan and darken with exposure, but they do. The appearance of these light streaks on the sides can be quite alarming! A little blending with dark chalk will prevent the visual appearance of the rear not filling the escutcheon as it should. After the first trim of the season, sun tanning will remedy this difficulty.

I have been asked if I feel this maneuvering of the coloring and clipping patterns is unsportsmanlike or illegal. My conclusion is this: a good judge is going to find the goat no matter how I groom her. But a careless judge, who will only see what has been presented to him, is going to be missing the good traits and finer points as well. We cannot make a good fore udder from a poor one, nor a fine rear udder from one that hangs from the escutcheon

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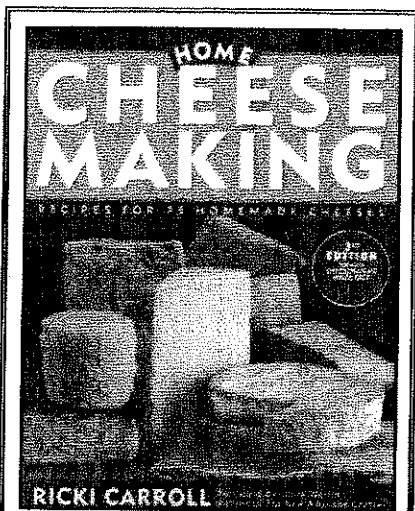
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like a pastry bag. But in the spirit of making it a "show," presenting the animal at its best advantage is certainly the goal of the day in handling, moving, and grooming as well.

All of the grooming we do, we do in public view at shows. We have had crowds come and watch us asking questions of how and why. We have shared with others the way to receive the desired effects. Purina made a tape of my grooming at a seminar and offers it for sale. This tells me that there are many others who would like to present their goats to their best advantage as well.



Make your own cheese at home!

BY RICKI & ROBERT CARROLL

It is possible to make cheese at home! Complete instructions for making delicious and nutritional cheese at home—easily and inexpensively—beginning with the very first batch. *Home Cheese Making* covers equipment you'll need, soft and hard cheese recipes, whey cheeses, suppliers and a newsletter source. A troubleshooting chart is included—just in case you need it. This is a classic reference. 144 pages. Send \$14.95 + \$2.50 p&h to:

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To see how others have interpreted the score card it was very beneficial to us to spend time ringside at a National Show. Then viewing the purchased tape of the classes on parade yielded even more ideas. To be sure that one gets the best presentation from any individual animal there is more, as I have said, there is far more to the show than what happens on a given day in a given ring. It is important not to lose track of the desired effect by knowing the score card and the location on each animal where it can be best illustrated. It is important to practice the enhancements with a critical eye beforehand

and to have the needed tools in your tack box. All this preparation will be for naught if one has not trained the animal to walk smoothly and freely at the desired pace to show to her best advantage. All of us at Nickel Farm have done our homework and as a team have reaped the result in more than 60 show champions over the years.

Clipping dairy goats can be hard work, but when done with a purpose and for a purpose, it is a difficult task made easier. Clipped goats are happier goats and most of the time, they blossom into beautiful works of art, as well.

Research spotlight:

Breed of Goat Might Affect Cheese Production

BY DR. ART GOETSCH
LANGSTON UNIVERSITY, OKLAHOMA

In the United States, Nubian and Alpine goats are two major dairy breeds and most dairy goat herds are in seasonal lactation. In this study, the effects of goat milk obtained from two dairy farms with either Alpine or Nubian breed of goats at various stages of lactation on yield, composition, sensory scores, and fatty acids of soft cheese (chèvre) were evaluated.

Results obtained from this study indicated that dairy goat breed did not affect cheese composition, sensory scores, and fatty acid concentrations except oleic acid. However, milk from Nubian goats resulted in a much higher cheese yield, a lower oleic acid concentration, and a lower unsaturated fatty acid concentration than that from Alpine goats.

Soft cheese made from late lactation milk had higher fat, protein, total solids, and yield than mid-lac-

tation milk. While the sensory scores of cheese from Alpine milk varied throughout lactation, those of cheese from Nubian milk were virtually the same, regardless of the stage of lactation.

If a dairy goat herd is raised to supply milk for cheesemaking, Nubian goats or a mixed herd with at least some Nubian goats will be of great interest to the cheese makers and in return the milk producers should get a higher premium for their higher cheese-yield milk.

In addition, a year-round breeding program could help minimize variations in cheese composition, yield and fatty acid concentration, resulting in a more consistent quality of cheese throughout lactation.

Released by Langston University. Sorryal, K., F.A. Beyene, S. Zeng, B. Bah, and K. Tesfai. 2005. Small Ruminant Research 58:275-281. Goat Newsletter, March 2007.