

A guide to visual assessment of goats



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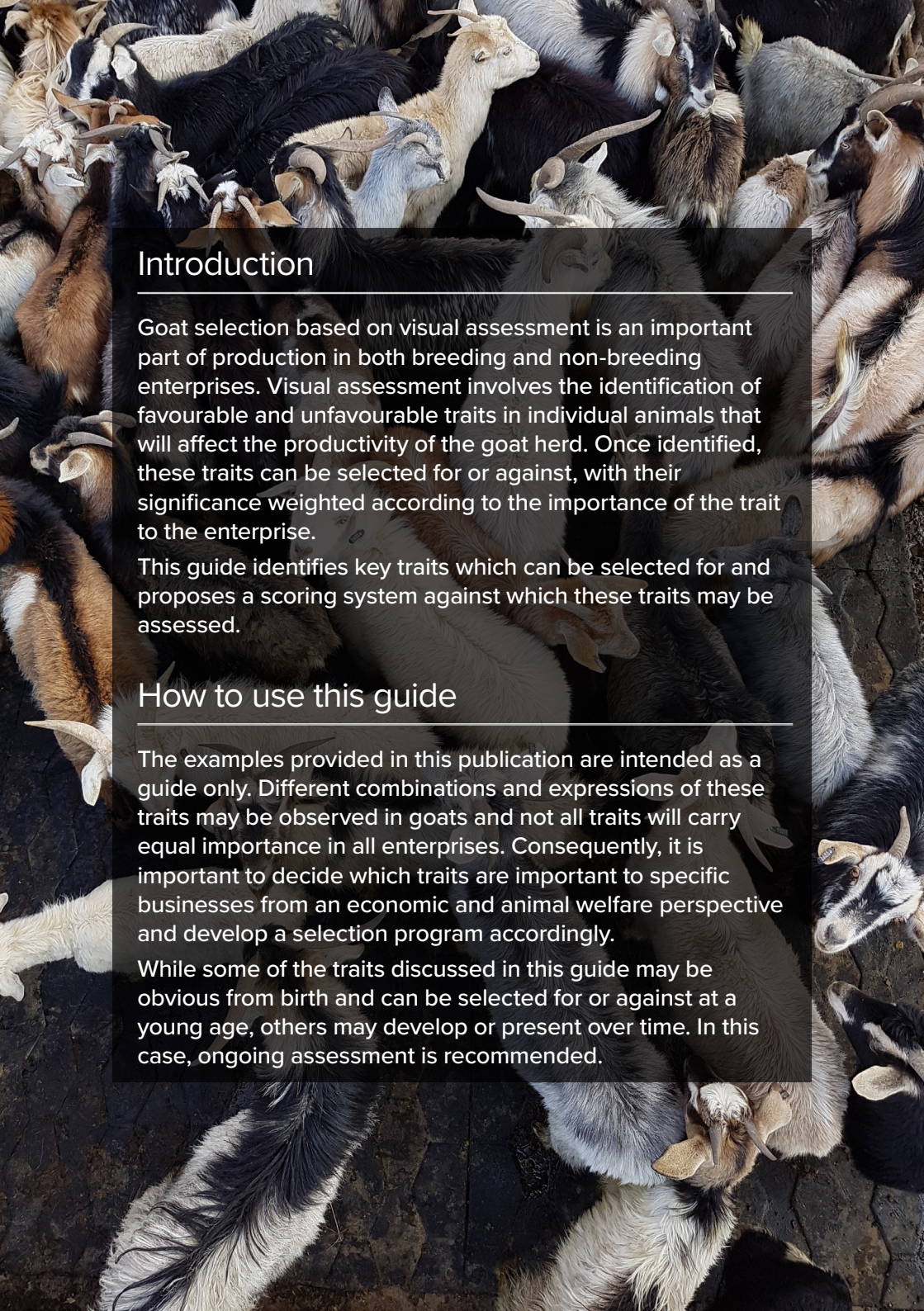
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Introduction

Goat selection based on visual assessment is an important part of production in both breeding and non-breeding enterprises. Visual assessment involves the identification of favourable and unfavourable traits in individual animals that will affect the productivity of the goat herd. Once identified, these traits can be selected for or against, with their significance weighted according to the importance of the trait to the enterprise.

This guide identifies key traits which can be selected for and proposes a scoring system against which these traits may be assessed.

How to use this guide

The examples provided in this publication are intended as a guide only. Different combinations and expressions of these traits may be observed in goats and not all traits will carry equal importance in all enterprises. Consequently, it is important to decide which traits are important to specific businesses from an economic and animal welfare perspective and develop a selection program accordingly.

While some of the traits discussed in this guide may be obvious from birth and can be selected for or against at a young age, others may develop or present over time. In this case, ongoing assessment is recommended.

Jaw and teeth

(JAW)

Age assessed

Around weaning and then annually at joining from about five years of age to ensure the teeth remain sound.

Description

Refers to the soundness of the jaw structure, including the alignment of the lower jaw and its teeth relative to the top jaw and its pad that the lower teeth bite onto. It also refers to the placement of the teeth, structure of the muzzle and lower jaw.

How to score

The upper and lower jaws of a Score 1 goat line up squarely at the teeth (i.e. teeth rest 'on the pad' with a wide muzzle and lower jaw), whereas a Score 3 goat has either a heavily 'overshot' jaw, a heavily 'undershot' jaw, severely misplaced teeth or a narrow muzzle and lower jaw.

Score

1

Upper and lower jaws line up squarely at the teeth (i.e. teeth rest 'on the pad'). Teeth properly placed and developed for the age. Wide muzzle and lower jaw.



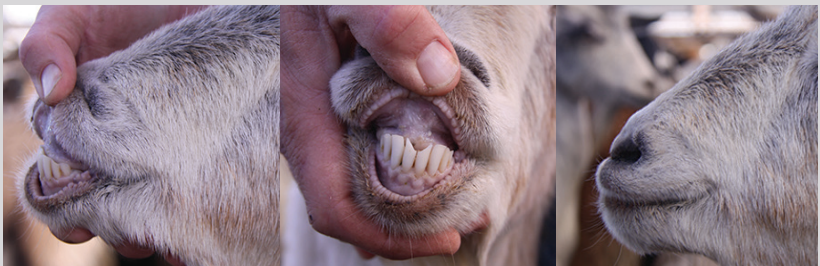
2

Jaw is slightly 'undershot' or 'overshot'; lower jaw is slightly shorter or longer than the upper jaw and as a result the teeth are either slightly behind or in front of the pad. Narrow muzzle and lower jaw.



3

Heavily 'undershot' or 'overshot' jaw; lower jaw is significantly shorter or longer than the upper jaw and as a result the teeth are either well behind or in front of the pad. Teeth badly misplaced. Very narrow muzzle and lower jaw.



Head and horns

(HEAD)

Age assessed

Around weaning and then annually
e.g. 42–120 days (7–16 weeks) and then prior to joining.

Description

Shape of the head and placement of horns.

How to score

A goat with Score 1 has a wide head and horns that are set well apart and curve backwards, leaving a wide gap between the horns and the head. A Score 3 goat has a narrow head shape, or horns that are set very close together, do not leave a gap between the horns and the head, or are abnormally-shaped or ingrown.

Score

1

Wide head. Horns that are set well apart, curve backwards and leave a wide gap between the horns and the head.



2

Slightly narrow head. Horns that are set slightly close together or only leave a narrow gap between the horns and the head.



3

Narrow head. Horns that are set very close together, do not curve backwards, or do not leave a gap between the horns and the head. Includes ingrown or abnormally shaped horns.



Shoulders and back (BACK)

Age assessed

Around weaning
e.g. 42–120 days (7–16 weeks).

Description

Refers to the soundness of the shoulder blades, their positioning in relation to the neck and spine and the shape of the top line.

How to score

A goat with Score 1 has firm and angular shoulders and a straight back between the top of the shoulder blades and hips. A Score 3 goat has shoulder blades that are loose or sit well above (or well below) the spine. Score 3 goats may also have an extremely 'dipped' backline, or a very steep rump.

Score

1

Shoulder blades sit squarely either side of the spine. No trough or ridge between the shoulders; back straight or slight smooth curve between shoulders and hips and a well-rounded rump.



2

Shoulders positioned below the spine to create a 'ridge' or above the spine to create a 'trough' between the shoulder blades; back dips moderately behind the shoulders (relative to the shoulders and hips). Rump moderately steep and rounded.



3

Extremely high and wide shoulder blades that create a deep 'trough' above the spine or extremely low and narrow shoulder blades that create a sharp 'ridge' above the spine and/or back dips severely behind the shoulders (relative to the shoulders and hips). Short rump falls away steeply.



Legs and feet

(LEGS)

Age assessed

Around weaning and then annually
e.g. 42–120 days (7–16 weeks) and then prior to joining.

Description

Refers to the soundness of the shoulder blades, their positioning in relation to the neck and spine and the shape of the top line.

How to score*

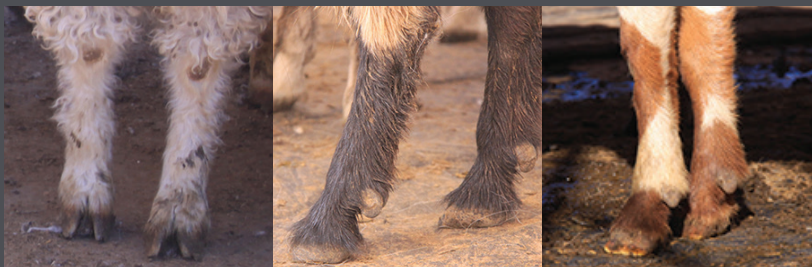
If the hocks and pasterns of the back legs and feet have moderate angulation (Score 1), but the pasterns of the front legs have extreme angulation (Score 3), then Score 3 is the overall score recorded for the trait.

*Highest score across the leg and feet component of all four legs is recorded.

Score

1

Straight legs that stand squarely on their feet; no distortion of the hoof shape; moderate angulation of hock and pastern.



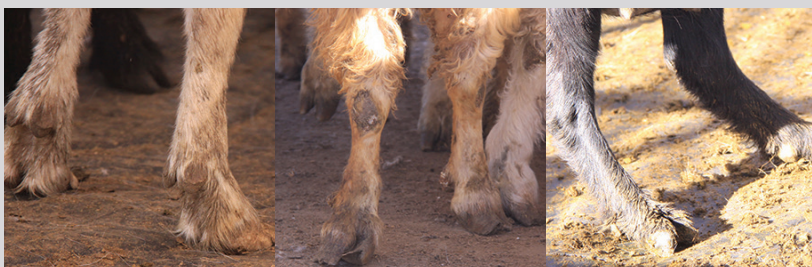
2

Significant hock angulation, and/or legs and feet turned slightly inwards or outwards, and/or moderate distortion of the hoof shape, and/or angulation of the pasterns.



3

Extreme hock angulation, and/or legs and feet turned inwards with hocks touching, or 'bowed' outwards; extreme distortion of the hoof shape, including long toes, and very small pasterns with angulation.



Hocks

(HOCK)

Age assessed

Around weaning and then annually
e.g. 42–120 days (7–16 weeks) and then prior to joining.

Description

Refers to the soundness of the hind leg structure, in particular the orientation of the back legs and angulation of the ‘hocks’ joint in relation to the feet.

How to score*

A goat with Score 1 has good width or stance, straight hind legs that have slight angulation at the hock and stand squarely over the feet. A Score 3 goat has hind legs that have extreme angulation at the hock, either inwards or outwards, and feet that are either splayed or pigeon-toed.

*Highest score across the leg and feet component of all four legs is recorded.

Score

1

Good width or stance, straight hind legs that have slight angulation at the hock and stand squarely over the feet.



2

Significant angulation at the hock, either inwards or outwards, and feet that are moderately splayed or pigeon-toed.



3

Hind legs that have extreme angulation at the hock, either inwards or outwards, and feet that either splay or pigeon-toed.



Udder and teats

(UDDER)

Age assessed

Annually prior to joining.

Description

Refers to the shape and soundness of the udder plus the number, placement and shape of the teats.

How to score

A goat with Score 1 has a well-shaped and even udder with no more than two, evenly-placed teats on either side. A Score 3 goat has an uneven, low hanging or excessively large udder, or more than two teats either side that are either unevenly placed, deformed or extremely under or oversized. Consider if a kid is able to attach to the udder and feed successfully (i.e. whether the udder is functional).

Score

1

Udder is well-shaped and even on both sides. Two functioning teats on either side of the udder that face downwards or slightly outwards and are evenly placed.



2

Udder is slightly uneven, or small. Two teats on either side of the udder that are unevenly placed, or slightly under or oversized, or slightly deformed.



3

Udder is uneven, excessively large or hangs low to the ground. More than two teats on either side, or teats that are deformed, misplaced, blunt, or extremely under or oversized.



Testicles

(TEST)

Age assessed

Around weaning and then annually
e.g. 42–120 days (7–16 weeks) and then prior to joining.

Description

Refers to the structure and soundness of the testicles and scrotum.

How to score

A goat with Score 1 has large, firm testicles that sit straight in a scrotum that does not have a substantial split. A Score 3 goat has severely undersized or twisted testicles, or a severely split scrotum or twisted scrotum.

Score

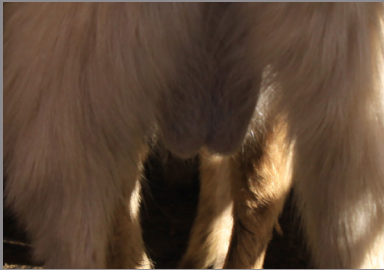
1

Testicles are large and firm and sit straight. Scrotum does not have a substantial split.



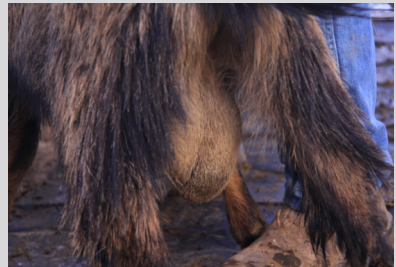
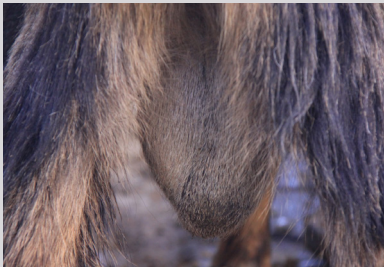
2

Testicles are slightly undersized, twisted or soft. Scrotum is slightly split (10–20% of the length of the testicle).



3

Testicles are severely undersized, irregular, twisted or soft. Scrotum is severely split (in excess of 30% of the length of the testicle).



Summary

Trait name	Abbreviation	Age assessed from*	Scores to be used	Page
Jaw and teeth	JAW	Around weaning and then annually at joining from about five years to ensure the teeth remain sound	A single score of 1, 2, and 3	2
Head and horns	HEAD	Around weaning and then annually e.g. 42–120 days (7–16 weeks) and then prior to joining	A single score of 1, 2, and 3	4
Shoulders and back	BACK	Around weaning e.g. 42–120 days (7–16 weeks)	A single score of 1, 2, and 3	6
Legs and feet	LEGS	Around weaning and then annually e.g. 42–120 days (7–16 weeks) and then prior to joining	A single score of 1, 2, and 3	8
Hocks	HOCK	Around weaning e.g. 42–120 days (7–16 weeks)	A single score of 1, 2, and 3	10
Udder and teats	UDDER	Around weaning and then annually e.g. at 42–120 days (7–16 weeks) and then prior to joining	A single score of 1, 2, and 3	12
Testicles	TEST	At weaning and then annually e.g. 42–120 days (7–16 weeks) and then prior to joining	A single score of 1, 2, and 3	14

More information

Fact sheets

1: Profitability in goat production

3: Understanding dressing percentage when marketing goats

The Going into Goats guide

Module 5 - Goat Selection

Module 6 - Husbandry, Tool 6.8 - Live body condition scoring - an assessment of fat reserves.

Module 12 - A practical guide to producing goats in the rangelands, Chapter 3: Animal husbandry and welfare > Section 3.5 - Breeding and Selection.

Publications

Agfact A7.2.2: How to tell the age of goats. NSW Agriculture, revised 2003.

Assessment skills for goat meat marketing. Agriculture Victoria, January 2007, ISSN 1329-8062.

Videos

A series of new best practice videos have been released to answer commonly asked questions.



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