

Cypriot family's rise to fame as leading goat breeder

What started as a chance encounter in the late 1920s grew into a goat breeding business that has now spanned five generations. That business is Y. N. Antoniadis & Sons Ltd and it produces the famous Cyprus Damascus (Shami) Goats.

Recently, International Dairy Topics visited Cyprus and went to see this famous goat breeder to find out what lies behind this successful breed of goat that is now exported to some 20 countries, including Lebanon, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Malaysia and Qatar.

In the future exports are to be targeted at India, Pakistan and Algeria.

Unique Syrian breed

In 1929 the great, great grandfather of the current generation's Nicolas Antoniadis was involved in trading around the eastern Mediterranean in his small boat. He exported fruit, especially, the carob fruit from Cyprus, and was always on the lookout for back loads. Then, in Syria, he saw a breed of goat which he had never seen before – a dual purpose (milk and meat) animal.

He liked what he saw and, thereafter, 10-15 goats regularly accompanied him on



Central feeding in the main goat building.

many of his return trips to Cyprus. Over the years the number of goats the family had on their farm near Pissouri, which is 35km from Limassol, steadily grew and, by 2005, some 2,000 goats were being milked twice a day.

Over the years he selected out his best goats and used these to generate the best sires, which are now individually assigned to groups of 25 females.

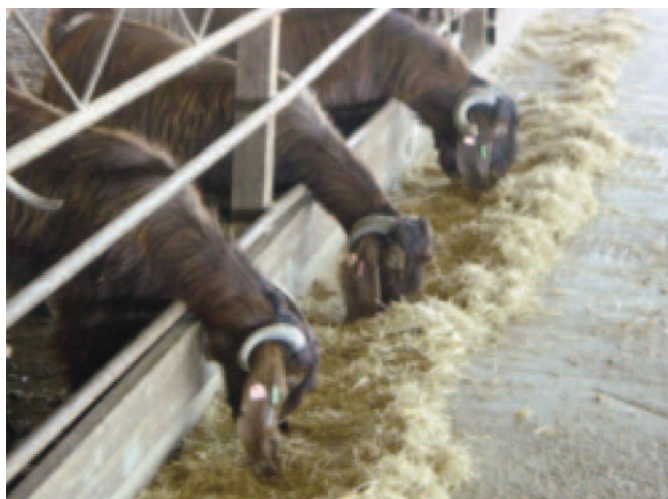
These sires are chosen on general and milk yield traits and are the main vehicle for genetic improvement.

The intensity of selection is now further helped by the use of artificial insemination. Even so, the Antoniadis family like their goats to have long noses and curly ears.

The family now operates its own Semen

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Left, total ration and, right, inside the milking parlour.





The young stock.

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Centre which houses the top males. The key operatives for this centre have been trained in Germany and Holland.

However, the backbone of the breeding programme is selection based on performance, even though well to do Arabs have been known to pay up to \$US50,000 for a goat solely based on its looks!

On their farm three pregnancies per goat typically occur every two years and to facilitate maximum milk production all kids are immediately removed from their mothers at birth and put into artificial rearing units.

Here they receive colostrum for two to three days and then artificial milk replacer for the next six weeks or so.

All parentage is known

All kids are tagged at birth so the parentage of every goat is known and can be traced back over the previous generations. This tagging and a knowledge of the performance of previous generations is integral to the process that selects those animals that will breed the next generation.

As soon as it is decided to exclude an ani-

mal from the breeding programme its tags are removed. Animals are double tagged in case one tag is lost.

Each year some 25-30% of the goats produced are sold or retained as breeders. Of the rest the poorest and the surplus males become meat and the remainder are sold as commercial milking goats to neighbouring farmers.

During the period up to weaning they are also fed creep feed and alfalfa hay, both of which are provided ad libitum. Then they are weaned and transferred to rearing-fattening accommodation where they are fed on concentrates and barley hay until 120 days of age.

Sexual segregation then occurs and the best males and females are selected as breeder replacements and then housed in batches of 25-30 head.

These animals then go through the veterinary programme which includes vaccination. Exported animals have to be declared free of certain diseases and the precise certification requirements vary by country.

Typical goat concentrate is 50% barley, 10% maize, 20% soya, 15% alfalfa and 5% vitamins and minerals and is automatically fed to the goats with hay. The goats are fed

by group with the high yielders receiving more concentrate. Typically a pregnant nanny receives 1.0-1.5kg of concentrate a day and lactating animals receive 2.0-2.5kg per day.

The young females are then introduced to the billy when they show their first oestrus which is usually between 220-270 days of age. The billies usually start their reproductive duties at nine months of age.

Prolific breeder

Nowadays, these goats have been developed so that they kid three times every two years. This maximises both meat and milk production, and, hence, the revenue per female.

At each kidding, they average 2.3-2.5 kids born. Most other goats breed once a year.

Typically, a milking goat produces 3.0 litres a day, but exceptional animals can produce 9.5-10.0 litres of milk a day.

The Antoniades family have always assessed their goats on their commercial performance which is why, in their hands, this goat breed has progressed the way it has. ■



Billies in the AI station.

