

Know what you're getting

There are many breeds of sheep/goats. They are utilized in different ways and labeled accordingly. It is important to know what different terms mean and what you are getting if you buy animals. While purebred and registered (or recorded) animals are usually more expensive, they aren't necessarily more productive. It is often a good idea for beginners to start with less expensive commercial or crossbred sheep/goats.

Purebred sheep/goats are the offspring of parents from the same breed. They make up only a small percentage of the sheep/goat industry but are essential to maintaining genetic diversity.

Registered sheep/goats have documented ancestry (usually three generations) recorded with a breed registry. No sheep/goat should be registered unless they conform to the breed's standards. Some breed associations require pictures or DNA for registration and/or have additional requirements. Even fewer sheep/goats are registered, though the proportion probably varies significantly by breed.



Fullblood is a term utilized mostly by the Boer and Dorper breeds. It is an animal whose entire genetic ancestry can be traced to the original stock from its country of origin. For most other breeds, fullblood means the same as purebred or the term is not used. To be a 100% New Zealand Kiko the goat must trace its lineage back to the original New Zealand stock. A DNA test is required to verify parentage.



Percentages are purebreds or crossbreds that are less than 100% registered. Some registries have open flock/herd books that allow the introduction of other breeds. They record the percentages and grant purebred status once an animal reaches 88, 94 or 97% registration, depending on breed. There may be other requirements for full registration, e.g., Katahdins must pass a coat inspection. Percentages are often part of upgrading programs. New breeds are often established to the US this way.

Recorded grades are mixed breed dairy goats registered by the American Dairy Goat Association (ADGA). They must be crosses between standard dairy goat breeds. It does not apply to Nigerian Dwarf goats. In sheep, the term grade refers to commercial unregistered sheep.



Crossbreds are sheep/goats with parents from different breeds, sometimes of unknown ancestry. The crossing can be planned (recommended) or is often indiscriminate. Hybrid vigor (or heterosis) is maximized when a crossbred female (F1) is mated to a male of a third breed. Most commercial meat-focused sheep/goat farms employ systematic crossbreeding.



The American Miniature Dairy Goat Association registers crossbred goats, but both parents must be registered in their respective breed associations. A miniature dairy goat is a cross between a standard dairy goat and a Nigerian Dwarf. Registration is similar for the miniature fiber breeds such as Pygora.

Commercial sheep/goats are typically unregistered, possibly crossbred and have been bred for production (or other) purposes, not breed purity. Most sheep/goats fall into this category.