

LEGITIMIZING SAVANNAH GOATS IN NORTH AMERICA:
QUENTIN'S QUEST AND LUBBE'S LEGACY

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(editing and review, by Dr.Frank Pinkerton, "The Goat Man", Martindale, Texas)

My personal interest in Savannah goats began in 1996 with a visit to Worcester and the World Boer Goat Championships. As president of the Canadian Boer Goat Association, I was interested in meeting many of the South African breeders who had exported embryos to Canada. In my earlier capacity as a consultant to Landcorp Farming of New Zealand, I became aware of Boer goat production performance and history through the publications of Dr.Quentin Campbell; the Worcester trip provided the perfect opportunity to meet him.

Dr. Campbell's 1984 paper on "The development of a meat producing goat in South Africa" was referenced in the prestigious Small Ruminant Research Journal (Casey and Van Niekerk,1988) which featured articles on "The Boer Goat", "Origin, Adaptability, Performance Testing, Reproduction and Milk Production", as well as, "Growth, Nutrient Requirements, Carcass and Meat Quality". Almost all of the performance data cited was the work of Dr.Campbell. The data had been collected while he was "Officer in Charge" of South Africa's Mutton Sheep and Goat Performance Testing Scheme.

Primary conclusions of this paper and others ("Performance Testing and Adaptability of Boer Goats", Campbell) are instructive:

- 1) "The future of Boer goats lies in **performance testing for economically important traits.**"...Performance testing "is the second phase in the development of the Boer goat breed. The first phase was the adoption of breed standards which developed uniformity of type, colour, hair and body conformation." (Casey and Van Niekerk)
- 2) "**No performance criteria are stipulated**...as faults for culling...in the Boer goat breed standards...such as semen quality, growth rate, feed conversion, fertility, mothering ability, milk production or carcass quality characteristics. Discrimination against furriness has been questioned..." (op. cit.)
- 3) Crossbreeding studies (Angwenyi and Cartwright, 1987) concluded that "the **Boer Goat was a logical sire breed**, contributing significant directly additive effects to body weights at 4 to 12 months of age, and to pre-weaning absolute growth rates. However, **Boer goat maternal additive effects were mostly negative.**"
- 4) "**Reproduction is the trait of the greatest economic importance**...Any breeder who wants to implement performance testing should keep proper ewe records...he should enter the ease of lambing...the growth rate of the lambs, lamb mortality, number of lambs weaned and the health status of the ewes as well as the lambs...**he should use these parameters for selection purposes...select for productivity and not for fancy points**...should breeders persist in paying a lot of attention to split scrotums and the amount of red hair and spots which may be allowed...very little genetic improvement for

economically important traits will be made.” (Campbell)

Quentin Campbell’s bias in favour of production economics over show ring determined “fancy points” reminded me of my good friend and mentor, Dr. Frank Pinkerton. Like other survivors of the early boom and bust days in the Boer goat business, I was determined to have **productive** animals under **commercial** conditions rather than overfed show animals. Like many others, I was concerned that Boer goat mothering characteristics and the sluggish behaviour of newborn kids as well as some herd sires was deleterious to commercial profitability.

Meeting “Quenty” in 1996 piqued my interest in Savannah goats. His paper on “The Origin and Development of Savanna Goats” and a later publication describing “The Savannah White Goats of Olierivier” (“Origin and Description of the Well-Adapted Indigenous Fat-Tailed and Fat-Rumped Sheep Breeds and Indigenous Goat Breeds of South Africa”) described the kind of goat I was looking for!

- 1) “Savannahs are sexually active during the whole year”
- 2) “One ram can be mated to fifty or more ewes.”
- 3) “Savanna goats have relatively simple and low nutritional requirements and can survive and reproduce where other small stock breeds can not exist.”
- 4) “Savannahs are the ultimate easy care goats.”
- 5) **“indigenous rams did not develop mouth, leg or hoof problems as was the case with some Boer goats.”**
- 6) **“Savannah goats produce a high net profit because of low input costs”**
- 7) **“Very good mothering ability and milk production of the ewes ensure fast growing kids. Savannah ewes must be able to kid in the veld and rear their kids without assistance ...and without (corralling) the kids.”**

Perhaps more importantly, I became determined to own some of these hardy, disease resistant white goats and began planning a return trip to South Africa. **Quentin Campbell’s lifelong quest for an “Outstanding Producer of Red Meat from Low Quality Grazing” (Boerbok Nuus, 1998) was now a personal quest as well.**

In the spring of 1999 I re-visited Dr. Campbell in order to interview him on the Savannah goat standard in preparation for a visit to see live Savannahs and the large farming operation of Lubbe Cilliers and his family. (the video interview of Dr.Campbell as well as Lubbe Cilliers describing the Savannah breeds history will soon be available on the internet)

The D.S.U. Cilliers stud was started in 1957. The family had a variety of indigenous “Boer” goats, or in the Afrikaans language, “farm” goats which were divided into various types (Van Rensburg, 1938, op.cit.) as follows:

- Ordinary Boer goats such as roan or “skilder” goats
- Brindle or Briekwa goats
- Mouse-eared or short eared goats
- White red-headed Boer goats
- Long-haired or “Jas” Boer goats
- Long-eared polled Boer goats

As was common in these times, many of these types were found in the Cilliers' flock since selection for uniformity in phenotype or for improved production characteristics had not yet been started in South Africa (The Boer Goat Breeders Association of South Africa was formed in 1959 in order to follow "a uniform breeding policy and selection program"...with the primary aim of educating breeders "as to the breed standard and in this way improve the breed.") Lubbe described it as "by chance" that one of his mother's indigenous ewes had a set of pure white twins and his school boy's dream of a "wit Boer-bok", a white Boer goat, was born. After 36 years of "natural selection" under extremely unfavourable conditions, a group of 12 indigenous white goat breeders met in November, 1993 at Olierivier and decided to form a Savanna Goat Breeders Society (red, roan and mouse-eared goats were included in 1996). **The Savannah goat is truly Lubbe Cilliers' legacy.**

Dr. Pinkerton in an earlier Goat Rancher article described this breed development process as follows:

"readers should understand that a recognized 'breed' came into existence when, and only if, a few interested and able men sat around a table and: 1) using a blank ledger, first created a Herd Book; 2) then arbitrarily decided the phenotypic characteristics of animals deemed desirable for inclusion in the Herd Book, and 3) arbitrarily identified and chose the initial 'foundation males and females', which were then given 'registration numbers' into perpetuity. Note that this collection of founding fathers constituted, by fiat, a Breed Association."

In South Africa, as in Canada, 'the herd book' is maintained by an 'arms length', un-biased and independent body that responds to breed association direction. Only one association is allowed to represent a breed. This registry function for Savannahs was provided by the South African Studbook. Since the Boer Goat Breeders Association had by now phenotypically defined a 'Boer Goat' as having a white body with a red head, Lubbe's dream of a 'White Boer Goat' was changed to a 'Savannah' in English or 'Savanna' in Afrikaans. A breed association with unity of purpose and strong leadership had taken six types of ordinary 'boer' goats and moulded them into one 'standard' phenotype, the red-headed "ennobled" Boer goat that we know in North America today. The branding process was so complete that "Boer" meant a red head and the "Association" would defend the usage of the name!

Dr. Pinkerton describes this aggressively protective relationship between "the Herd Book" and the "Association" as follows:

"Such an Association Herd Book may be closed or open. If closed, only descendents of the original animals selected for the Herd Book may be registered. An open Book permits subsequent additions of 'outside' animals' sired only by Herd Book-registered males, through a closely controlled process of 'grading-up'. The original phenotypic characteristics used to denote 'minimal standards' for registration may, or may not be modified over time.

All such decisions were, and are, at the discretion of the Association. The strife and tribulation accompanying such decisions, large and small, are near endless, but the decisions are, in point of fact, necessary for the perpetuation of the

breed-and, equally important, the membership. The primary function of any Association is to maintain operational exclusivity via control of the Herd Book; all else is peripheral. Do not think otherwise.”

Just as the Herd Book and its control through an active Association are fundamental to breed survival, **a breed’s integrity; and therefore its legitimacy, derives from a registry that embraces two fundamental aspects of a “distinct breed” (Agriculture Canada):** 1) Genetic stability of the breed population as evidenced by **the proven relationship of all animals to a common foundation population with common origin and history.**

2) Genetic stability of the breed population as evidenced by **successive generations of adherence to established breed standards.**

My trip to acquire Savannah genetics from the Cilliers’ herd was successful and Keri-Rose Boer Goats entered the new millennium dreaming of a new breed for our Scandia, Alberta farm. The first, embryo derived, Canadian born, Savannah goats hit the ground in the spring of 2000 but they didn’t remain Canadian citizens for very long. We had made a decision to “move south” and follow our goat dreams to the Galaxy Ranch, the farm of Kay and Ellis King near Kinston, North Carolina. **It was not until we moved our operation into the United States that we realized what a tremendous challenge the establishment of a credible registry was to become!**

Jurgen Schulz (CODI-PCI) imported the first South African Savannah goats into North America. They were imported late in 1994 to a primary quarantine facility in Florida with a larger shipment of Boer goats and a small contingent of Dorper sheep. The total Schulz Savannah herd of 34 animals was subsequently sold through the Kifaru Exotics sale barn in Lampasas, Texas on December 5, 1998. **Little is known about the production or sale of any of these original imports prior to the complete herd dispersal sale at Lampasas.**

The only documentation provided to Savannah purchasers at the sale was a “Dear customer” cover letter indicating that the animal they had purchased had originated “from Mr.Cilliers’ farm in South Africa” and that “These are the only Savannah goats in this country”. One generation of pedigree information was provided and customers were informed that “The United States does not have a Savannah goat registry.”

The Keri-Rose herd of 29 Savannahs (17 bucks and 12 does) did not stay long in Kinston but were moved to the Turkey Tracks operation of Steve Quinn and Sharon Valentine near Fayetteville, North Carolina. **Fortunately, the Keri-Rose Savannahs were all blood sampled for DNA storage at the Saskatchewan Bovine Blood Typing Laboratory in Saskatoon prior to export. Also, while in Kinston, South African Stud Book certificates were obtained through the dedicated efforts of Koenie Kotze, a South African Savannah breeder who had provided donor animals for our embryo import.** (Pat O’Brien of Benalto, Alberta had also participated in the S.A. embryo importation with Keri-Rose and their small herd of 2 does and a buck remained in Alberta, Canada.)

I say “fortunately” because my proximity to other breeders; Mike Browning, Erick and Derick Wilson (Timberlake, N.C.) and Jerry Webb (Ivor, Virginia) allowed for the rapid multiplication of our Keri-Rose genetics through several ET programs conducted by the Wilson brothers. Big “E” and little “D” Wilson were estate heirs of Mike Browning, an original purchaser of Jurgen Schulz’s Savannah genetics at the Kifaru sale. **More importantly, communication between breeders was starting to identify the fact that we had a serious problem on our hands. Imposter, white goats were being offered for sale as authentic “Savannahs”. Setting up a registry is always a challenge, but in the case of the Savannah goat in North America, it was like “closing the gate after the horses had already gone.”**

Since the only other known source of Savannah genetic material imported from South Africa was through DNAfrica, this small group of Eastern breeders began a vigorous communications campaign to try and reach other breeders across the U.S. in order to verify the origin of their stock and prevent “the imposter problem” from growing.

DNAfrica, was an organization spearheaded by Johan Campher. Mr. Campher had set up representatives (DVMs) in Canada to sell South African embryos and take advantage of the importation protocol which was in place between Canada and South Africa. **The U.S.A. has never had a direct protocol in place for South African embryos. In this light, Jurgen Schultz’s live importation was amazing to say the least!**

Dennise Peterson of Hanford, California as well as David Hagen from Minnesota worked with Canadian veterinarians to implant recipients and produce an unknown number of live Savannahs. These animals must have arrived on American soil sometime before the end of 2002 because it was at this time that Ms. Peterson was actively trying to establish the World Wide Savanna Goat Association. Personal communication with Dr. Brian McOnie of British Columbia (a DNAfrica representative) confirmed the authenticity of Ms. Peterson’s program but privacy concerns would not allow him to elaborate on its size, its success rate in terms of live kids or the pedigree information provided by DNAfrica.

Stephanie Mitcham (Sumner, Iowa) and Tye Williamson (Lubbock, Texas) were the only other known sources of authentic South African Savannahs. Both breeders had animals which could be traced back to the Schulz Kifaru Sale through verifiable sales records and bills of sale.

Every known owner of authentic Savannah goats, as well as Paulette Wohnoutka of Pedigree International and Ron Stein (Lake, Mississippi), were invited to a December 14, 15 (2002) meeting (convened by Dr. Pinkerton associates, Bob and Rita Patton, Redlands College, El Reno, Oklahoma) to discuss the future of the Savannah breed. Critical questions on the agenda included:

- 1) Do we approve the World Wide Savanna Goat Association? Or, develop a new one?
- 2) Do we accept the South African Breed Standard or the one proposed in the WWSGA bylaws?
- 3) Do we continue registering with Pedigree International? Or, is there a more competitive alternative?

- 4) If a decision is made to establish a new registry, do we accept Pedigree International's paperwork? Can we legitimize a registry established with no formal association direction and support and with the knowledge that un-ethical breeder(s) already have animals in the data base?
- 5) What role will performance testing play in Savannah breed development and promotion?

The "meeting", regretfully, deteriorated before it could resolve any essential questions and I returned to Grapeland, Texas and my mentor, Dr. Pinkerton for counsel. We produced two papers in January, 2003 ("The Savannah Goat in North America: A Proud Past; An Uncertain Future" and, "The Savannah Goat in South Africa: Preserving a Proud Heritage") in order to try and educate Savannah enthusiasts on a) the importance of the South African breed standard, and b) the serious challenges facing the breed development process if a responsive registry to breeders' concerns was not developed immediately!

The silence was deafening. **With the best interests of the breed at heart, the North American Savannah Association (NASA) was incorporated on August 25, 2003 as a Texas Non-Profit Corporation. Dr. Frank Pinkerton, Elgin Pape (a Texas Spanish goat rancher) and Brian Payne were the founding directors.** The stated purpose of the "corporation" was **"to develop and promote the Savannah goat in North America by maintaining a breed registry and encouraging seed stock performance recording."**

The decision to form the N.A.S.A. was motivated by the following concerns:

- a) Economics – **The registry services provided by Pedigree International were too expensive.** A \$25.00 registration fee would not allow for a planned association surcharge which would be needed to provide a future funding base for breed promotion and development. The cost of an anticipated D.N.A. recording system would be prohibitive if breeders were already paying \$25.00 for a single registration certificate. Furthermore, **most breeders were reluctant to continue to legitimize a registry which had been established without any association direction as to foundation stock identification and verification.**
- b) Democracy – Most breeders had been made aware of the World Wide Savanna Goat Association but no one had been invited to a public forum in order to discuss the rules for registration or the breed standard. **The overwhelming opinion of Savannah breeders was that the WWSGA placed far too much emphasis on physical appearance (phenotype) rather than on performance in their breed development strategy. Most importantly, the WWSGA was set up by a breeder with the registry office "in house". The potential for a perceived conflict of interest was too great for the majority of Savannah breeders to support this early attempt at an association.**

The sincere but failed effort to recognize the importance of Pedigree International and the WWSGA in El Reno resulted in an immediate need to search for an organization that could provide registry services. The three founding directors mentioned above, as well as the following individuals, paid a \$300 charter membership fee in order to pay for the creation of a "legal entity" and its anticipated computer programming needs: Pat

O'Brien, Benalto, Alberta, Canada; John Tarnowetzki, Tuffnell, Saskatchewan, Canada; Ron Stein, Lake, MS; Charles Barnes, Sims, NC; Erick and Derick Wilson, Timberlake, NC; Dale Coody, Lawton, OK; Lonnie Durbin, Central, SC; Dr. Lynn Harwell, Seneca, SC; Zelotes Shaver, Grapeland, TX.

Brian Payne was instructed to address the following key issues:

- 1) **Obtain a buyer list of the original Savannahs imported by Jurgen Schulz and later dispersed through his Kifaru sales facility.** Given the highly heritable coloration of the breed, the exotic nature of very few authentic foundation animals, and the suspicion that imposter Savannahs were already being put forward for registration made this information vital to the establishment of a credible registry. **We can't thank Jurgen Schulz enough for his help in accessing the Kifaru sales documents.**
- 2) **Contract the services of an experienced, economical, un-biased (non-breeder) registrar** to provide the registration services for this exciting new breed in North America. **The American Dorper Sheep Breeders' Association (ADSBS) and their hard working registrar, Ronda Sparks (P.O.Box 259, Hallsville, MO 65255-0259, ph 573-696-2550 or email (nasaregistrar@yahoo.com)) were chosen to provide registration services with initial computer programming initiated in December of 2003.**
- 3) **Provide the registrar with a clear definition of fullblood foundation stock and specify the documentation which would qualify them for acceptance in the N.A.S.A. herdbook.** For registration purposes, initial **fullblood foundation stock was identified as:** a) **Savannahs imported by Jurgen Schulz** in 1994 and subsequently sold at his Kifaru Dispersal December 5, 1998. Breeders must provide original Kifaru Sales documentation, verify any subsequent sales or transfers of ownership and provide their private breeding records to register their animals; b) **Savannahs born from embryos imported by Keri-Rose or DNAfrica** must be accompanied by government importation documents, certificates of embryo transfer completed by both the exporting veterinary team and the domestic implant team as well as their private breeding records (ie recipients utilized) and any subsequent sales or transfers of ownership.

Now that the registry is functioning smoothly **I sincerely encourage all Savannah enthusiasts to get their registrations up to date, re-new their memberships and participate in the further development of the North American Savannah Association! The Herd Book is OPEN as described above!**

The collective vision of the founding charter members was to provide economical registry services for all commercial meat goat operators who believe in on farm performance testing for herd improvement. The fabulous wealth of commercial meat goat genetics across North America must be harnessed if the industry is to continue to improve and develop. Meat goat enthusiasts who are concerned more with profitability than a red ribbon are "the kindred spirits" that N.A.S.A. wants to provide services for. **CREATE YOUR**

OWN AMERICAN SAVANNA(H) PUREBRED FROM YOUR OWN COMMERCIAL HERD!

It is anticipated that in future, performance criteria will become a pre-requisite for breed sire registration. Please contact Dr. Kenneth Andries, KYSU-Frankfort (kenneth.andries@kysu.edu) or Dr. Pinkerton for further information or enrolment details. As Dr. Pinkerton so often says, registration certificates trace only pedigrees, not performances; and secondly, phenotypic evaluations mostly tell one what their goats look like, not how well they will perform – on pasture, or at the bank! **Pedigree, without performance, is meaningless!**

In concluding this short history of the Savannah breed in North America and the formation of the North American Savannah Association, **I would like to publicly thank my close friend and partner, Chris Glynos, Bethlehem, Ct. for his years of meticulous stockmanship supporting and improving the Keri-Rose herd. Whenever I see the “Footprints” plaque in a gift shop, I know who was carrying me.**

I would also be remiss if I did not emphasize the critical input of **Stephanie Mitcham, Sumner, Iowa** in the early, formative days of association establishment. Stephanie provided me with many valuable ideas and suggestions. It is also important to recognize the contribution of **Nan Brock, Palestine, Texas** as a former recording secretary and treasurer.

“Quentin’s Quest and Lubbe’s Legacy” could not have been protected without the help of the above-mentioned individuals.