

The Savannah Goat in North America:
A Proud Past; An Uncertain Future
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Savannah goats were first imported to North America by Jurgen Schulz late in 1994. The Schulz family had been engaged in the importation of exotic animals from Africa for many years and the surge of speculative interest in Boer goats provided the incentive for this business venture. The Savannahs were a small part of a larger shipment of nearly 500 animals which included primarily Boer goats but also some Dorper sheep.

The entire shipment of animals entered the United States through the Truman Quarantine Station in the Florida Keys. They were released later to a “USDA approved quarantine station near Goldthwaite, Texas” (Ranch and Rural Living, May, 1995) in May of the next year. The Boer goats became identified as CODI-PCI animals within the American breed registries and have contributed significantly to the development of the Boer goat in the United States.

Little is known about the production and sale of Savannah goats from the Schulz ranch in the three years following their importation and quarantine. We do know however, that the entire herd of 34 goats was dispersed through the Kifaru Exotics Sale Barn in Lampasas, Texas on December 5, 1998.

Almost all of the original South African imports of this pioneering period did not have pedigree information issued through a central breed registry; an import permit, an embryo certificate, a South African stud number and a sire and dam was all that was required for registry purposes. The authenticity of the imported livestock was primarily dependent on the stud breeders’ embryo production

records, his reputation in the South African industry and his breeding records (pedigrees).

Reputation and records are still the core criteria in evaluating the authenticity of registered, purebred seed stock today. However, most of the early pioneers in the Boer goat industry remember the phrase: “If it looks like a Boer It is a Boer!” Many naïve investors bought white goats with a red head and thought they were purchasing a full blood animal. In other words, in the absence of a credible, centralized registry and breeding records an “exotic goat” can sell for large sums of money based on phenotype (appearance) alone!

Given the highly heritable nature of white as a colour, small numbers of true Savannahs and a poorly organized group of breeders, will we soon see a wave of white goats put forward as being authentic South African Savannahs?

The future development of the Savannah breed in North America has several serious challenges to overcome if it is to be successful:

- 1) Identifying authentic Schulz foundation stock and their offspring.** This problem has been compounded by the fact that the original Schulz Savannahs were widely dispersed with no central registry in place to track and record changes in ownership or to document the generations of kids produced from the original foundation stock. The Pedigree International registry was not established until at least a year and a half after the Kifaru dispersal (Goat Rancher, August 2000).
- 2) Preventing the potentially divisive development of two classes of Savannahs.** Original South African imports (Schulz, Keri-Rose, DN Africa) with good documentation as compared to poorly documented Schulz derivatives.
- 3) Most critically, maintaining the integrity of the breed by**

setting up a registry that is backed by a DNA verification system in order to separate true descendents of authentic South African Savannahs from white imposters. **Setting up a registry is always a challenge, but in the case of the Savannah goat in North America, it is like “closing the gate after the horses are already out”!**

Clearly, **a registry is only as good as the documentation provided by the participating breeders.** Is it the registry’s problem if a new breed is introduced but there is no breed association in place to instruct the registrar on “proper documentation?” **Breed associations are critical to the success of a registry** because it is the “association” that defines “foundation stock” and sets the criteria for an animal’s entry into the herd book. **The association also defines the breed standard and creates the rules for registry that further refines and develops the breed.** Perhaps most importantly, however, the association unifies breeders and sets ethical standards for conduct in the breeding and sale of purebred livestock.

- 4) Given the history outlined above, perhaps the most daunting challenge facing the Savannah breed today is to try and build the trust and cooperation required for association development with a responsive and credible registry as its foundation.**

If current Savannah goat breeders are able to overcome these serious impediments to breed recognition in North America, the breed’s proud South African history and the legacy of the initial Schulz importations and others will shine in North America, just as the CODI-PCI name has shone in the Boer industry.

