

Why Reunion Island Goat Breeders Prefer SA Goat Meat

Our trip in SA in the Eastern Cape in February during the Eastern Cape Show at Willowmore was an important moment for some Reunion Island goat breeders. Our two countries, SA and Reunion, are very different: size, landscape, climate, breeding plan... and language! But these two countries are similar in one aspect: SA Boer goats are very popular in Reunion and in SA.

I am new to the goat sector, but I was very surprised that the Reunion Island breeders, who visited the Eastern Cape, especially the oldest, greatly enjoyed the quality of Boer goats and totally adopted the Boer goat standard.

I think that, thanks to this trip, Reunion Island breeders could understand the quality of Boer goats in SA. To see what real Boer goats are helps a lot to learn and makes it easier than learning with pictures.

I prefer Boer goat to Reunion indigenous goats. It is only my opinion and perhaps some Reunion Island breeders would say that they prefer indigenous goats because Boer goat meat is too fat and the animals have low resistance to diseases, but more than 90% of the goats in Reunion Island are Boer Goats. How do you explain that?

I visited South Africa (especially the Eastern Cape) many times to see Boer goats; I learnt and shared (it's not easy with my poor English) with top South African breeders and read and read again the Boer Goat Newsletter. I am convinced that SA Boer goats (including Kalahari Reds and Savanna) have the best meat goat in the world. The creators and the fathers of these breeds wanted to resolve the hunger problem, to improve the income of the breeders and to increase their economic value. It's agricultural management. BUT who can explain to me why Reunion Island breeders, especially the oldest, who have been breeding Boer goats for 50 years, who never studied goat management on their farm, who can't speak English, and who never visited South African breeders or never saw SA Boer goats, have adopted the same standard even if they have a very different breeding management?

The SA Boer goat characteristics are the answer to the SA climate, breeding, market... and it is very strange to think that our market and breeders adopted the same standard. It is the same for customers. They can buy local goat or dairy goats at a better price than Boer goats, but they prefer Boer goat for Tamil rites. It is true to say that Boer goats have more meat and a better quality meat, but Tamil people use old rams, aged more than 12 months. And the way they cook the meat - with a lot of spices (massala) and for a long time – makes it easy not to taste the goat.

There is one main difference between SA and Reunion: Kalahari Reds are much more popular than Boer Goats in Reunion Island and our main breed standard includes Boer Goat, Kalahari Red and Savanna. For us it is the same genetic pool as we cross Boer goat with Kalahari Red. In SA the difference is greater between the quality of Boer goat and Kalahari Red than in Reunion Island. For example, at our local show some Kalahari Red rams or does fare much better than Boer goat rams or does.

During the training session at Jansenville, the breeders who passed level 1 with Johnny Henderson and Vaatjie Nell (the only Afrikaner who can speak French fluently!) learnt much about Boer goat characteristics (what you need to check to select a goat). After the session one of the breeders told me, "I not only learnt what I need to do on my farm to improve my flock; I also learnt why I breed Boer goats". If the junior session was "easy" the senior school was harder because of the language and also because it is easier to judge bad animals than very good animals. In Reunion Island what is considered as a "top goat" will be judged as a flock animal in SA.

Our standards are very similar in various points. In SA, short and narrow ears are not acceptable because it is very important to regulate the body temperature (like elephants). In Reunion Island there is no objective explanation, but breeders and customers love goats with large and long ears! You can get a much better price for goats with long ears. For example, in 2005 we imported Boer goats from Germany. The conformation was acceptable (better than what we had before but much lower than in SA's and Australia's Boer goat conformation), but some breeders considered that the animals were not Boer goats because the ears were too short (owing to absorption with Alpine or Saanen). The Roman head is another important point. Some breeders regard the Roman face as more important than meat conformation!

But we have some differences with the SA standard:

	Reunion Island
Pigmentation	Animals are bred in housing. More than 25% pigmentation is acceptable.
Size	Bigger is better. We feed them and they are not obliged to walk to find food.
Femininity	Some breeders prefer does with a masculine head and neck. For them a doe with a masculine head will produce kids with a masculine head. From my own experience, I could see that a masculine doe became pregnant later than feminine does and have less mothering capacity.
Colour	All colours are acceptable but the most appreciated is solid colour (red, white, black).

The only negative point of this trip was that Reunion breeders realised that they would never have the same quality for their goats than South Africa. It is true, but if we don't try we will never improve our goats.

It is certain that the easiest way to quickly improve our goats is to import embryos from SA, but I think that this way is closed for a long time. So the only way we have is to work with our genetic pool, to work like the South African breeders did and to share experience with the original Boer goat experience, like we did during this trip.

That is why I would like to warmly thank the Eastern Cape Boer Goat Club, especially Kobus and Louretta Lotter's family, Vaatjie, Sakkie and Nicky Nell for their help to make this trip a success. And many thanks to all the people and the SABGBA committee who were in Willowmore. It was a great time for us. Definitely a Boer goat is not only a goat. Now we understand the Eastern Cape Boer Goat Club slogan, *Where acquaintances become friends*.