

## **Boer Goats**

By L. Hungwe & T.L. Magwirototo



*Boer doe. Pic by L. Hungwe*

One of the ways of dramatically improving your livestock operations is to use improved breeds. Improved breeds are “improved” in the sense that they are developed by deliberately selecting and “fixing” desirable traits like high growth rates, fecundity, twinning, milk production, wool etc. If your management capacity and resources permit, you could be interested in the following breed.

### **Boer Goat**

Highly adaptable goat breed developed in South Africa.

Adult buck weighs between 110 - 135 kg, and ewes 70 to 100 kg. Some farmers in South Africa reportedly have bucks which weigh up to 160kg.

What makes this goat special is not skin colour or the shape of its horns but its performance as a meat producing goat. Qualities which has made this goat very popular the world over are; adaptability, hardiness, resistance to disease, milk production, meat and pet quality,

fertility and longevity. These traits of economic importance have made it a world class goat of noble gentry.

Boer goats are highly adaptable. They can be found in varied climatic and physical regions of the world. They have spread from the Eastern Cape to the rest of South Africa including the Kalahari Desert. They can do well in cool or cold regions, desert like conditions, rocky places and in humid conditions of the tropics. They can also perform under extensive production systems or optimally in intensive feedlot conditions. Their adaptability has allowed them to spread throughout the world; they can be found in the dry, hot, rocky hostile conditions of Namibia and the very cold weather of Canada. Today Boer goats are found in Australia, North and South America, Asia and Europe.

Boer goats are hardy: they are resistant to disease such as Blue tongue, prussic acid poisoning and internal parasites when they are allowed to graze above the ground. This reduces veterinary costs to the farmer and challenges associated with internal parasite drug resistance.

Boer goats are able to produce enough milk to raise twins without a challenge. They have a high twinning and weaning rate. They have excellent mothering ability and produce enough milk to raise kids that mature early. This allows the farmer to go to the market early and it solves one of the challenges of our indigenous goats when we cross breed with them.

Fertility is an important economic trait, Boer goats can breed throughout the year. Twinning is common and desirable, kids are weaned at 90 to 100 days, and puberty is reached early at about 6 months for the males and 10-12 months for the females. The Boer goat is able to produce kids every 8 months. Feeders are slaughtered at 4 - 12 months when they weigh between 40 – 50 kg. Good breeders are able to produce kids which gain an average of 200 g/day in feedlot an average weight gain of 150 g/day can be achieved.

Boer goats produce meat and pelts of high quality. The meat is yellow, succulent and low in cholesterol particularly at young age. Biltong and sausages of high quality can be made from the meat. The carcass quality of Boer goats is very high: it has a very high meat yield. This makes them ideal to cross breed with our indigenous goats