Body weight and preweaning growth rate of pure indigenous, Toggenburg goat breeds and their crosses under smallholder production systems in Kenya

C. O. Ahuya[1], A. M. Okeyo[2], R. O. Mosi[2], F. M. Murithi[3] and F. M. Matiri[4]
[1]*Farm Africa-Dairy Goat and Animal Healthcare Project, P.O. Box 2980, Meru, Kenya*
[2]*University of Nairobi, Dept. of Animal Production, P.O. Box 29053, City Square 00200 Nairobi, Kenya*
[3]*Kenya Agricultural Research Institute, Headquarters, Kaptagat Rd., P.O Box 57811 City Square 00200, Nairobi, Kenya*
[4] *Kenya Agricultural Research Institute, Regional Research Centre, P.O Box 29 Embu , Kenya*

Introduction. Livestock improvement programmes involving smallholder farmers have not been common in the past particularly where crossbreeding is involved, partly because small holders have no infrastructure to support a crossbreeding programme. FARM-Africa has introduced an alternative approach, the community based goat improvement programme, with smallholder farmers. The objective is to increase the productivity of the local goats in the eastern highlands of Kenya and thereby increasing the livelihood and welfare of the smallholder farmers. The strategy has been, to use the farmers self help groups as an entry point to the community. With the establishment of buck stations, for crossbreeding with local goats and breeder units for the production of pure Toggenburgs in the groups and the formation of a farmers organization to organize and coordinate the improvement activities and ensure sustainability of the programme. The benefits that farmers enjoy include faster growth rates and milk from the crossbred goats.

Materials and methods. Data on reproductive and growth performance was collected on goats of various genotypes from all farm records of participating farmers in a community-based dairy goat genetic improvement and health care project, being undertaken by the FARM-Africa in collaboration with the government of Kenya, in Meru District in central Kenya. The goat genotypes included the exotic dairy Toggenburg (T) breed, the indigenous meat breeds the East African (EA) and the F_1 crossbreds arising from mating Toggenburgs with EA and Galla (G) indigenous goat breed, as well as the products of backcrossing the F_1s (TxEA and TxG females) to the Toggenburg males. The detailed mating plan and project's approach is given elsewhere (Ahuya,, 1997). The farmers are grouped into voluntary farmer-groups, with each group sharing on breeding buck at any one given time, to which all their does are mated. The group members also share common basic animal healthcare services and technical advice from the local extension staff on goat husbandry and forage technologies. The kids were weaned at an average age of 120 days. This paper presents and discusses, the comparative birth weights, 60-day weights and average daily gains of goat kids of the various genotypes. Least squares analysis of variance was performed using GLM procedures of SAS (Version 8), (SAS, 2001) to investigate the effects of year of birth, genotype, agro-ecological zone, sex, type of birth and farmer-group on single birth weight, 60-day kid weight and average pre-weaning daily gains of the kids**.**

Results Least squares means and their standard errors for birth weights, 60-day weights, and average daily gains, for the various genotypes are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Toggenburg kids were superior to all the other genotypes in all the growth traits while the East African kids' performance level was the least for all traits, with the F_1 kids, as expected being mid-way between their parental means for birth and 60-day weight, but much higher than their mid-parental means for average daily gain. The Toggenburg kids were twice as heavy at 60-days and gained two and half times as much weight as their East African counterparts up to weaning. The backcrosses, with the exception of the ¾Toggenburg- ¼ Galla were not significantly ($p>0.01$) different from the F_1s in all the traits. These findings are consistent with, and slightly better than earlier results on crossbred goats involving the same breeds and breed levels (Ahuya, 1987; Ruvuna et al., 1988; Ruvuna et al., 1992; Okeyo et al., 1999). In the earlier studies like in this study it was observed that crossing of Toggenburg with Galla goats resulted in a heavier and faster growing animals than when the former was crossed to the East African goats. However, the East African goats are more tolerant and resilient to the local diseases and gastro-intestinal parasites (Okeyo, 1985; Baker et al., 1998), hence the need to have a combination of all the three breeds (EA, G and T).

Conclusions

The results of this study demonstrate that crossing of Toggenburg dairy goat breed with the indigenous Kenyan meat goat breeds is economically beneficial as it results into significant improvement in growth

rate and meat production potential. Reasonably high growth rates are achieved at farm level, and even better than those achieved at experimental station stations, hence community-based breed improvement programmes have merits.

Table 1. Least squares means±standard errors for birth and 60-day weights of East African (EA), Toggenburg (T) and crosses between Toggenburg and EA or Galla (G) goat kids.

Genotype	No. of observations	Birth weight (kg)	Weight at 60 days (kg)
East African (EA)	357	2.98 ± 0.21	6.32± 0.15
Toggenburg (T)	329	3.72 ± 0.19	13.51± 0.34
T x EA	575	3.42± 0.04	9.87± 0.65
T x Galla	143	3.56± 0.06	10.34± 0.21
¾ T ¼ G	74	4.10± 0.38	11.54± 0.36
¾ T ¼ EA	98	3.57± 0.35	10.62± 0.08

Table 2. Least squares means± standard errors for average daily gain (gm) of East African (EA), Toggenburg (T) and crosses between Toggenburg and EA or Galla (G) goat kids.

Genotype	Number of observations	Average daily gain (ADG) (gm)
¾ T ¼ EA	175	121± 0.05
¾ T ¼ G	86	149± 0.03
TxEA	467	129 ± 0.67
Toggenburg (T)	256	230± 0.42
East African (EA)	193	89± 0.43

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