

HELPFUL HINTS FOR DHIR MILK TESTING

GOING ON MILK TEST WITH AGS

Official milk testing with the American Goat Society through the National Dairy Herd Improvement Association is called “DHIR”. DHIR is one of the most exciting programs available for goats. DHIR helps you decide if your feeding, breeding, and management programs are working, as well as advising you which animals can better contribute to your herd goals of milk production.

At least 10 times during the year, about a month apart, a certified DHI technician comes to the farm and weighs and samples each doe's milk. The samples are sent to a lab to be tested for butterfat and protein percentages and optional somatic cell count. After each test, the lab sends the herd owner a report of the lab analysis, which also list cumulative amounts (lactation to date) of milk, butterfat, and protein, as well as many optional reports.

To begin the testing process, first find out if there are any other goat herds on test in your area to see what type of testing they use and if DHI testing is available in your area. This will help you determine which type of test you want to participate in.

The most inexpensive type of testing is “circle testing”. A circle is a group of three or more herd owners who test one another. All three must own and test dairy goats. Circle members can own either AGS or ADGA registered goats. All members in a circle group must be trained prior to going on test by a certified DHI supervisor. There is a supervisor fee associated with supervised milk testing, but in circle testing this fee is waived, since members test each other. If the cost of supervised testing is prohibitive, there are innovative testing programs (ITPs) available. See the AGS milk test rules in your AGS handbook or on the AGS website for a description of the various types of ITPs.

If you choose an ITP, you will have to do a whole-herd verification test during the test year. Verification tests (VT's) are *REQUIRED* on all herds using ITP, and when a doe milks a certain amount of milk or butterfat. Those amounts are in the AGS DHI rules. It is the responsibility of the herd owner to be aware that a VT is needed and to make arrangements to have one done. A VT can be done either in lieu of, or in addition to the regular test. It can be also done by a one-day test, either at the farm or at another location. See the VT rules for more information on this. If a VT is required, it must be done before that lactation ends, and it's recommended that it be done about midway through the testing year. You must request forms to be used for the VT from the DHI Coordinator. A VT test is required for does to be eligible for Lincoln awards.

If there are other DHI herds on your area, find out which DHI association, lab and Dairy Record Processing Center (DRPC) they use and if they are satisfied with the service. There are five DRPCs in the country, and you may choose the one you want to use. The AGS office and the DHI Coordinator have a list of the DHI associations and DRPCs. They all charge different monthly fees, usually about \$2.50 per animal.

If you can't find a circle to join, try to find either a goat or cow tester. It's more expensive to have a supervised test, due to the tester's fee and mileage fees. Most cow testers charge a substantial fee, but may agree to test you for a reduced fee when testing a nearby cow herd. If you can't find a circle or a cow tester, ask a nearby friend (it can't be a relative, a paid employee, or anybody with a financial interest in your goats) if he/she would be willing to be trained and licensed as a milk tester.

When you have found someone willing to test you, contact the AGS DHI Coordinator for an application. You'll also receive either a set of rules or a memo telling you where to look up the rules. Make sure you read them and be prepared to follow them to the letter. Send your application, required fee, and annual

doe list at least 30 days before your first test to the DHI Coordinator. You will receive permission to test (a copy will be sent to the DHI association you chose) and then you can set up your first test date. You can start on DHIR anytime, but renewal applications, fees, and annual doe lists for subsequent years are due by January 31 of each year. The DHI Coordinator will send you a renewal application in December of each year.

The rules for milk testing are sometimes very confusing to a herd owner who is on test for the first time. Here are a few rules you should remember.

- When you send in your application, be sure to include on your annual doe list all does in your herd "of a breed" (the breed(s) you will have on test) that have ever freshened or are expected to freshen during the coming year. If you have does you do not milk, contact the DHI Coordinator for advise; you may be able to leave them off the herd list.
- All does of a breed living in your herd regardless of ownership must be entered on the doe list. Any new does entering the herd during the year must be added to the list and sent to the DHI Coordinator with the appropriate fee. Does not added to the herd list before the end of that herd's DHI year will not be eligible for stars, awards, etc.
- Make sure all miniature does are measured during their lactation **by the tester or other AGS approved person (veterinarian, county extension agent, or AGS judge)**. An official AGS measuring stick, available from the AGS office, must be used. Use a copy of the annual doe list to record heights. Send the height statement to the DHI Coordinator at any time, but no later than the deadline for records (March 1). No records will be accepted on miniature does who have not been measured. The height will become part of the official record. If the doe is over height, "OH" will appear as part of the record.
- The herd owner is responsible for sending in all completed records. Since AGS has no way yet of obtaining milk records electronically from USDA or the processing centers, we must rely on the herd owners. Owners of does on DHIR test are required by AGS regulations to send in *all completed milk records*. A completed milk record is *any* record resulting from the doe being dried up or leaving the herd, no matter how short the days in milk or how low the amount of milk produced. When you report that a doe is dry or has left the herd for any reason (death or sale), your data processing center will send you an "individual cow sheet/doe sheet", or "doe page". Check the doe page to make sure it is 100% accurate, and make sure it indicates in the status box that it is a completed record (dry, left herd, etc.). If it's a completed record, it will show the date and the new status; i.e.: dry, died, sold, etc. Make a copy of the doe page (never send originals of anything) and send it to the DHI Coordinator. Keep all original doe pages for future reference. The DHI Coordinator would greatly appreciate it if you could send in the copies of your completed doe pages as you receive them. This will prevent having to work with hundreds of records at the last minute.
- The DHI Coordinator must receive completed records by March 1 for them to be considered for the previous year's Production Awards. For example, all milk records *completed in 2001* must be received by March 1, 2002. Records received after that date will be added to the database, but will not appear in any year's Production Awards.
- If a doe is on an extended lactation after December 31, and she won't be dry by the deadline, send in the **barn sheet** listing the doe's 305-day lactation. The 305-day and lifetime records will be used for the year being compiled. When the doe finishes the lactation, send in her doe page to the DHI Coordinator. The extended lactation record will be used for that year.
- Records of does completing a lactation in a particular year will be used for that year's Top Ten Production and Lincoln awards as long as the doe was on the herd list and per doe fees paid and the records are received by the office by March 1. See AGS rules for Lincoln awards, which require a verification test.
- +S, *D, and *S titles are awarded automatically as long as records have been sent in. You will receive an annual notification list/application for AR certificate listing all does who completed records for that report year. No application or fee is necessary. Certificates for the award are

available for \$3.00, and contain all qualifying records to date and a photo of the doe, if you submit one. The normal revision fee is required to add the designations to the registration certificate (send your registration paper to the AGS office with \$2.50 to add the star and AR number).

- The DHI Coordinator will send a notification form annually listing all does that completed records for that year. The notification form is also an application for an AR certificate. Certificates for the AR award are \$3.00 and contain all qualifying records to date. The doe's photo can be included on the certificate if you send a photo either by mail or by e-mail attachment (please use jpg format). If you'd like your registration papers revised to add the star and AR number, send them in the AGS office accompanied by \$2.50 for each registration paper.
- Owners on test will receive a Top Ten Awards brochure for their DHI year at no cost. Others may order it from the office for \$5.00.