

Colored Angora Goats- Myth or Reality
written by Isa Jennings 1987
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One day while looking at some angora goat does of a well known breeder in this area, he told me that for the first time in his life one of his does had a copper red buck kid, much to his surprise. Needless to say I bought the critter, who gave me this year my first crop of colored kids.

The years in between were filled with lots of frustration, hopeful waiting, disappointments, and finally some thrilling progress towards my vision of purebred colored lines of angora goats.

After getting the buck (a fading red gene), I spend 2 ½ years searching for colored does. I wrote hundreds of letters, spent a lot on phone calls, and slowly bits and pieces of information accumulated, despite the fact that very few people bothered to answer my letters. I soon found out that colored angoras in Texas, where angoras are raised literally by the 1000's are mostly regarded as undesirable freaks, defective goats whose mohair will be docked by the mills, "black" spots on your "snow-white" reputation, as always being cross-breds. Plainly not wanted and as such eliminated.

However, there seem to be always a few goat raisers who are also handspinners and who appreciate and save nature's occasional diversity.

Doesn't all this sound a bit like the black sheep 50-100 years ago?!

During the letter campaign I got in contact with Dr. Sponenberg, a specialist on rare breeds genetics and Linda Mercer, a very knowledgeable angora goat breeder and handspinner. Their support and advice has been invaluable, when practically everybody else was saying: forget it- there is and can be no such thing as a purebred colored angora!

Linda and I also shared an adventure to Colorado and the Navajo Nation in Arizona. I flew down, scouted out 9 goats in 5 days of endless driving with the help of two Navajo Indians, who probably thought I was pretty weird, but who willingly caught the ranging goats with their lassos, so I could take a look at them. We gathered them in a barn in Window Rock, AZ and Linda and her husband picked them up and brought them back.

With Dr.Sponenberg's help we have identified already possible color patterns and he thinks it quite likely that some time in the future each of us can choose which pattern to breed for: solid black, brown, blue or fading red, mantled, reverse badgerface, grey with white bellies, etc. The colors and hues are truly striking and you just can't get them by dying.

What the fiber will look like, we don't know yet. Some of my goats have mohair like the white ones, that is one kind of fiber. Others have also to varying degrees a fine undercoat and colored medulated fibers (different from kemp). We are playing with apparently very "old" genes and some seem to be connected with the kind of fleece the animal had way back in Turkey. At this point though these are all guesses and only time will tell. We have set up a directory to gather information about who has what kind of colored goats. Please contact Linda or me regarding this.

I was asked about the benefits of raising colored Angoras and aside from having all this lovely mohair the biggest is the challenge of overcoming the dominating gene, which cause the white angoras and the dominating opinion of the breeders that color is "bad:- the latter I suspect will take longer.

You are welcome to come and see my goats anytime and feel their silky, lustrous black, grey, silver, brown, fawn, and cream fleeces- just give us a call first.

However, on April 5, 1987 between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm I will have a special farm tour and fleece sale with a talk on raising and breeding colored angoras and suggestions on how to use this rare fiber effectively.

Isa Jennings
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