

British Goat Society

Report on consultation with members.

During 2009 a series of five regional meetings were held throughout the UK in order to consult with members of the British Goat Society on current services provided by the Society and the future direction of the Society.

Meetings were held as follows;

14th March – Sussex
23rd May – Scotland
31st May – Durham
3rd October – Northern Ireland
17th October – Derbyshire.

The Chairman of the British Goat Society attended every meeting and was supported by several BGS Committee members at each meeting.

Each meeting followed the same format wherever possible;

- Welcome and introduction by the BGS Chairman
- Presentations on how the BGS developed from its early formation unto the present day, where it is now and where we want it to go in the future
- An open discussion with BGS Committee members
- Split into discussion groups (led by BGS Committee members) to consider the following – **What the BGS does well and should continue to do? What the BGS does not do well and should improve?, What new services BGS members would like to see introduced? And how does the BGS safeguard the health status of the National Herd?**
- Feedback from the Group meetings.
- Summary of the main points from the day.

Mary Allen (vice-President) attended both the Sussex and the Derbyshire meetings in order to give the presentation on how the BGS developed from its inception to the present day.

There was generally a great deal of consensus from all five meetings on all four questions. I deliberately did not provide information on the findings of each (earlier held) individual meeting as I did not wish it to influence the discussions taking place.

The Scottish meeting was held on an evening between two back to back shows at Forfar Auction Mart. The other four meetings were held as separate events.

I must acknowledge the contribution to organising each event as follows;

Sussex – Richard Pemble

Scotland – Agnes Aitken and the Highland Goat Club

Durham – Durham Dairy Goat Society

Northern Ireland – Terry Hanna and the Northern Ireland Goat Club

Derbyshire – Joanne Smith and the Derbyshire Goat Club

The first question asked was, **“What does the BGS currently do well and should continue to do?”**

All five meetings were in agreement with the following – Herd Book, Registrations, Web site, Year Book and Health and Legislation updates

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The Herd Book above all was identified as the most important role of the Society, representing continuity, heritage and information. The speed of turning around the kid registrations by the office was appreciated.

There was general agreement that the BGS served as a single point of contact for goat keepers.

The Monthly Journal came in for very mixed reviews. There was general consensus that a monthly publication should be retained if possible. Content was questioned at four of the regional meetings. Various comments were recorded including the need to include articles for beginners. On each occasion I did point out that, whoever the Hon Editor was, the content can only be as good as the material available and that it beholds us all to contribute news, articles and photographs for inclusion in the Monthly Journal. Some members felt it would be useful to be able to access the Monthly Journal on line through the website but the majority felt that it should continue in its present form

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The BGS system of milk recording and show awards was identified as a useful tool in demonstrating goat's abilities.

Milking competitions were identified as a useful indicator of milking ability.

The ability to download various forms from the website was appreciated.

The introduction of on line payments for goods was appreciated.

The BGS recognition and promotion of high health status was applauded.

The integrity of members of the BGS Judges panel was highlighted.

The Year Book was found to be entertaining and of good quality, with excellent articles and photographs.

The list of Show dates and show results were appreciated.

The “For sale/wanted” section of the Monthly Journal and web site was appreciated.

The holding of Autumn Conferences and the Annual General Meeting around the Country was much appreciated, giving more members the opportunity to attend.

The web site received great praise as a way of promoting the Society and bringing updates to the membership quickly. The recent inclusion of show results is very popular.

The series of consultation meetings are appreciated and several members suggested they should continue into the future.

Question two was, **“What does the BGS do less well and should improve?”**

Interestingly, although not surprisingly, the Monthly Journal came in for some criticism. It was felt to have poor content, too many photographs and fillers and could do with more articles of interest. Some members felt that fewer editions with a higher standard of content would be preferable. However, others were happy with the current 11 editions per year.

Suggested content included, information for beginners, a “problems” page, more news from Affiliated Societies, information on how to start showing goats, articles from old monthly journals a more interactive “letters to the editor” section and commercial goat farming section. One suggestion was to have a fixed term Hon Editor.

Promotion of the BGS was seen as an area that needs to be addressed, particularly in respect of recruiting new members.

It was felt that the BGS office should be more “customer friendly” The function of the office was questioned along with the image it presents to the outside world. It is the first point of contact for many and should be more user friendly.

Some felt that the BGS was not an inclusive organisation and was too focused on dairy goats and showing.

There were many comments about the BGS needing to embrace new technology more quickly. The introduction of PayPal and payments by direct debit were highlighted.

It was suggested that the BGS should have more of a hands-on approach to the national Breed shows.

Some members asked if kid results could once again be included in show results now that shows are attracting smaller entries.

Better quality registration cards were suggested.

It was felt that better feedback by the Committee on the outcome of forwarded Affiliated Societies Resolutions was required and the Committee were asked to pay more regard to the resolutions.

The lack of an annual Stud Goat List was regretted.

The disappearance of a list of Breeders likely to have stock for sale in the Year Book was regretted.

It was suggested that more use could be made of on line report filing e.g. show/judges reports.

The Society's Rules and Regulations were not seen as "user-friendly"

Milk recording results published in the Monthly Journal required more information to be included.

The Show calendar should be more comprehensive.

The BGS does not promote goats produce well enough.

There was considerable support for the BGS to issue duplicate registration cards in the event of the original being lost

The contact information published in the Year Book and on the Web site is occasionally out of date.

BGS leaflets need updating

Milk recording is not promoted sufficiently well.

There should be more non committee jobs delegated to members in order to share the work load.

At the Northern Ireland meeting it was generally agreed that the BGS does not promote itself to goat keepers in Southern Ireland

A lack of BGS presence at Agricultural Shows was seen as regrettable.

Question three was, **"What new services do members suggest the BGS introduce"**

Cultivate better communication with and be more inclusive of other goat species and their Breed Societies e.g. Pygmy, Angora, Boer, etc.

Develop facilities for on line kid registrations and transfers of ownership.

BGS to take a more active role in fighting the goat keeper's corner regards EU issues.

In Northern Ireland members suggested altering the BGS system for issuing a Judges License to members residing in Southern Ireland (currently they are only allowed to judge in Northern or Southern Ireland)

It was felt that the BGS should encourage closer contact with all of its Affiliated Societies.

Some members felt it was time to decide if the Society was a "Goat" Society or just a "Dairy Goat" Society.

The introduction of an Education Pack was proposed at two meetings in an attempt to attract new younger members.

Better promotion of the BGS was urged through articles/adverts in Farmers Weekly, the NFU magazine, Smallholder, etc

A great deal of support was forthcoming for the Grassroots System. The ability to trace pedigrees on line was much approved

One member suggested savings should be made by reducing the size of the Committee.

More should be done to encourage Smallholders to join the Society

Public Speaking engagements should be undertaken in order to promote goat keeping. A list of potential speakers to be kept and up dated centrally.

Funding should be explored with a view of employing an "Education Liaison Officer". This appointment would enable more marketing and publicity to take place.

Goat keeping should be linked to "food miles" and climate change

Introduce a new special rate for new members together with a welcome pack. If members are selling stock to non members, perhaps we should have a system in place whereby a six month free membership could be offered.

Re-introduce a junior membership category – free. An Education Pack should be made available to help attract children and for use in schools/community groups.

Introduce a section for novice goat keepers on the web site.

Introduce a question and answer section on the website.

Re-introduce a register of goat milk and produce suppliers to be held and updated centrally.

Investigate possible links to Natural England's "Grazing Animals Project"

Introduce a section for pet goat owners in the Monthly Journal and Web site.

Introduce greater recognition for extended lactations through milk recording.

Better communication with outside organisations such as Agricultural Colleges, etc.

Adopt a more commercial approach to the supply of services and fees.

The final question was, "**How does the BGS safeguard the status of the National Herd?**"

This subject was felt by many to be the number one priority. The value of the BGS Monitored Herd scheme was highlighted. Continued communication with SAC was urged.

Health status schemes were deemed extremely important and the BGS was urged to continue lobbying on behalf of members.

It was suggested more health status services could be delivered "in house" in particular Scrapie monitoring.

The frequency of CAE testing was an issue raised at all meetings.

It was generally felt that the BGS should do more to promote the importance of the health status of the National Herd, particularly to new members.

The question of testing for CL and Johnnes Disease were raised.

The BGS was asked to continue to negotiate a better price for blood testing with SAC.

Conclusion

Although very time consuming, I feel this was an extremely useful and helpful exercise. It has enabled members from throughout the UK to take part in the consultation and to feel they have had an input.

Meetings were generally well attended and conducted in a very positive frame of mind. It was clear that those who did attend have the BGS very much at heart and feel they want to contribute to a new, positive future.

Very little criticism was found and a great deal of positive suggestions were put forward.

From a practical point of view the timing has worked out well. With the appointment of a new Secretary imminent and a change in the way the Society works through the possible introduction of the Grassroots System, the meetings could not have been more relevant.

Hopefully it will also have eliminated any lingering feeling of the Society not listening to its members.

The challenge now is to think about what we do with the information and how we take the whole range of issues forward.

Richard Wood
Chairman