

meet Sugar & Spice— the Saanen Goats

by Jacki Sonewald, INTERPRETIVE SPECIALIST



THE ADDITION OF SUGAR AND SPICE, two Saanen goat kids, to the Well Bred Shed at Lake Metroparks Farmpark brought excitement and smiles to staff and guests alike. Goat kids have always been a treat, delighting everyone with their antics and energy. The pair was just eight weeks old when they arrived in September 2010, and true to all goat kids, they were inquisitive, playful and mischievous. As they have grown over the months into young does, they have begun to display the qualities that lead many goat keepers to cherish the Saanen breed.

Saanens are the largest of the dairy goat breed, measuring 30- to 35-inches at the shoulder. The does (females) weigh approximately 150 pounds and bucks (males) can weigh up to 200 pounds. Their hair is short and white. Although the Sable is a Saanen with colored or patterned hair, the Sable is now considered a separate breed since breeding one Sable to another rarely produces a white-haired offspring.

Despite their size, Saanens are known as “living marshmallows.” They have a calm and mild-mannered disposition that makes them easy to handle and popular for children participating in showmanship classes at fairs and dairy shows.

Saanens are known as the “Holsteins” of the dairy world. While they do not make as much as a Holstein cow, Saanens can produce up to two gallons of milk per day and approximately 239 gallons of milk per year. Like the Holstein cow, the Saanen goat produces the least amount of butterfat in their milk. Their milk is approximately 3.5% milk.

Saanens are born with horns, but you won’t find many who get to keep them. Because of the way the horns grow (straight up with a slight curve toward their tail), they can get stuck in equipment,

other goats and even farmers! To prevent injuries to the goats themselves and the people who handle them, the horns are often removed before they really begin to grow.

Saanen goats get their name from the Saanen Valley in the Canton of Bern, Switzerland, where the breed developed. They spread throughout Europe through importations in the late 1800s. Saanens arrived in the United States between 1904 and 1930.

Today, the Saanen is the third most popular breed of dairy goat, coming in behind the Nubian and Alpine goats. The number of dairy goats in the United States has been slowly increasing over the last decade as consumers have shown a greater interest in goat’s milk and cheese. Wisconsin has the largest number of dairy goats in the United States; Ohio ranks 15th in dairy goat population and ninth in overall goat population.

Sugar and Spice are great examples of the easygoing Saanen. It’s hard to get these goat kids down and they love the attention they get from guests and staff. Come visit the Well Bred Shed and find out for yourself how entertaining these goats can be.

Saanens are known as “living marshmallows.”

