



Dealing With Aggressive Bucks

— Written By NC Cooperative Extension

Bucks are vital to the goat producer's bottom line. Those new to goat production find the selection and capital outlay for a buck as a commitment to herd improvement. Established producers view bucks as a genetic savings account that contributes half the genetics to their herd, with good ones ensuring future success. Neither new or established goat producers enjoy dealing with an overly aggressive or mean buck. Several factors can contribute to a buck's temperament. Genetics, amount of human contact, and the nature of human contact a buck has been exposed to, all contribute to a buck's behavior.

Genetically, bucks are similar to males of other species such that their genetic makeup, inherited from their parents, is composed of genes that may be more aggressive, more passive, or more timid than their contemporaries. Some families, or lines of breeding are inherently more aggressive than others in the same family. An animal from an aggressive family, is not necessarily aggressive, but has a higher potential to be. Aggressive bucks are generally more aggressive, when breeding, with pasture mates and in dealing with humans. Aggressive bucks are a fact of life in goat production, and producers must understand how to deal with these animals.

The amount of human contact a buck has exerts a great deal of influence on their attitude towards people. Some bucks are almost constantly in contact with humans, while others are rarely exposed. Animals with a great deal of human contact, tend to lose their fear of humans, and can become very aggressive toward them. In turn, bucks raised in isolation from other goats fail to develop the social skills needed to exist in group situations and can become very aggressive. Bucks with little or limited human contact, retain their basic fear of their human counterparts, and tend to be less aggressive toward them.

The attitude of the producer has the greatest influence on a buck's personality. Exerting your will on a buck, regardless of the circumstances, can influence his temperament. Producers, who are aggressive while handling, feeding or working bucks, generally pass this attitude on, and the buck develops the same attitudes. Hitting,

slapping, loud noises and quick, snappy movements can all stimulate aggressive behavior in a buck. A calmer, more methodical approach, that takes advantage of the animal's natural tendencies to get things accomplished, lessens buck aggressiveness. Behavior that some producers regard as affection, such as rubbing or petting a buck's head, or using his horns as handles may be viewed as a challenge by the buck, and he may respond with aggression.

There are basically two types of aggressive bucks; bucks that are aggressive when you take possession of them, and bucks that have the potential to be aggressive. Aggressive bucks are a liability issue to the producer, not only endangering them but others who may be on, or nearby the farm. Bucks that are mean, or overly aggressive should be sold. You wouldn't keep a biting dog, would you? In some situations, a buck's value may be so high, both through his offspring, and in the show ring, that producers may not be inclined to sell him. In these cases, he should be managed to account for his aggressive behavior. House these bucks, separately, reducing their human contact. They should be fed and watered without entering the pen or paddock. When working these bucks, confine them to a small pen or chute, to restrict his mobility. Don't try to make friends with him or tame him down. This usually complicates the situation. Always have someone to help you, so you can be in control. Don't mismanage them, but never trust them.

Bucks with the potential to become aggressive, such as younger bucks, should be handled differently. Producers should still try to leave them alone. The surest way to raise non-aggressive bucks is to leave them alone. Don't pet, scratch, rub or push on their heads, treat them roughly or tease them. Watch young bucks for signs of aggression early in life. Watch for kids that don't move away from you when you approach, those that move toward you or try to butt you. Most of all, watch those that try to move behind you, or approach you from behind. These bucks are almost predatory, and will become dangerous. They should be eliminated from the flock if possible. Most bucks will at some point, challenge you, particularly after puberty, but there is a difference in these teen-age challenges and overt aggression.

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