



THE SAVANNA GOAT THING

BY TREVOR BALLIF

“ARE YOU HERE FOR THE GOAT THING?” I smiled and said, “Yes, the Savanna goat thing,” checking into the motel in Bolivar, Missouri with a lobby filled with familiarity but uncertainty. I knew some of these faces from seeing pictures through the years on Facebook. I walked over with a hand extended and misidentified the Barnharts and the Dunnings. I thought to myself, not the best

way to start off with potential customers in the first minutes.

Savanna Spectacular, also known as “The Gala,” was held the weekend of October 12-14th at the Polk county fairgrounds in Bolivar. Paulette Wahnoutka, the owner of Pedigree International Savanna registry, (Pi) was the hosting sponsor. The event was originally planned for 20-30 Pi clients to gather for a day’s lecture followed by a pen sale. As many might

already know, the Savanna goat is in high demand but with its limited genetics, even Savanna breeders need to buy goats. The initial interest was high, but the planners would not be sure of the realistic attendance.

Glen Edwards, of Indian Territory Farms, was the

Diamond sponsor early in the planning, providing necessary funds for deposits and insurance for the event. Glen has hosted a few field days in the past and was well aware of the work and money needed. Many of us in attendance did the easy part by sending in some money to help, but the hard work is always left to the few.

My business model is original Savanna genetics work, with the existing Savanna breeder as my primary customer. This event was a perfect chance to see, and meet for the first time, some customers who have received shipped goats, and network new contacts. I am happy to say it was much more than that. I have attended many weekend conferences and auctions in the past where many of these feels like “cookie cutter” events, but this was different. This is my favorite so far.

The Friday evening arrival dinner was hosted by Pi (the Savanna goat registry) at Boones BBQ in Bolivar. This was a client-only event in the rented event room. This was

“Your brand is who you are. Marketing is the story of who you are. Photos bring your story to life. Advertising and merchandising are how and where your story is told.”

— Allison Rosauer
of Three Oaks Goats

an event in itself, packed with 80 Savanna breeders from all around the country. For me, this was a second chance to get names right and network. Not happening ... as I was the one who gave the "Gala" nickname to the event, creating confusion about formal dress, I was called to the front podium and given a "goat tie of shame" to wear for the entire weekend events. This placed on me the laughter of the guests. Ah, I thought, this won't be the time to talk breeders into buying expensive bloodlines, so much for my plan. As Mike Tyson said, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face," or in my case, given the "tie of shame." I end up just people-watching.

A special guest of the evening was Carl Langle. Carl was a purchaser of Savannas from the original import dispersion sale in 1998, and was instrumental in getting Pi to register the Savanna goats. Many of the Pi clients have seen DLR in their pedigrees and made way to meet Carl. This warm family restaurant was a perfect setting for bonding of new and old friends. Donated gift baskets and door prizes were presented to winners of the raffle draw.

Saturday morning found many of us chatting in our hotels. These informal groups are where many of us really got to understand each other's operations. The most common topics early were the safe topics, such as grain costs, price of hay, and how many Savannas in the operation. As we felt more comfortable with one another, topics moved to achieving breed standards, roman noses, black pigment, performance, size, and registry. I have had these same talks with breeders when I got my first Savanna in 2007 from Jerry Webb (NJW). The names of breeders back then were Brian Payne (KRI), Dale Coody (4C), Tim Swain (TTS), Dawn Steiger (RSR), and Denise Peterson (Amore). I



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Author Trevor Ballif wears the "goat tie of shame."

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hinged on every word that anyone would say, trying to figure out who had it right. Those folks are now just entries on pedigrees. This time around, I am one of the seasoned savanna breeders in this conversation, but those opinions are identical. Just like in 2007, we are not all on the same page. In any business, I think the right answer is held by the customer, they decide with their money.

A covered pen area with about 20 Savannas was set up next to the lecture hall. I noticed right away that the breeders bringing goats would only lease a few pens and house the remaining goats in their trailers. I was surprised by the total goats to be around 50, much more than I originally thought. Goat sales for this event were planned as private treaty, as the focus of the gathering was education and networking; but

many brought extra goats to sell.

Saturday's lectures featured the full house of the total attendees: seating for 96 with a few standing in the back. As Friday's dinner was Pi clients only, the Saturday and Sunday events were open to all. Allison Rosauer of Three Oaks Goats led off the lectures with her talk on marketing. She has decades of experience in the horse world and delivered an excellent focus to goats. The summary of her points was: Your brand is who you are. Marketing is the story of who you are. Photos bring your story to life. Advertising and merchandising are how and where your story is told.

The second guests were David and Brittney Carwell of B&D genetics. David brought the audience through the process of semen collection, laparoscopic AI, flushing with embryo transfer. Although many have heard of the processes, the photos bring

this big topic to life. David must split his time with genetics work and comedy, as he both educated and entertained the crowd.

Dr. Stefanie Oppenheim, professor at University of California at Davis in the Veterinary Genetics Lab, was the next speaker. She brought insight to what is done at VGL with our DNA samples and the exciting things that are coming. As we have all seen with human DNA, each year brings more and more possibilities. The SBT technology that is coming to VGL, will be able to data mine goats exponentially more than the 44 markers of today. This leads to the question: do you really want to know what is in a hotdog?

Speaking of food, which I tell people that I majored in "eating" in college, lunch was provided from Subway, a sponsor. The weekend was filled with food ... lots of food ... too much food. Three-pound weight gain in three days ... just sayin'. All this while still wearing my goat "tie of shame."

Bob Glass from Pan American Veterinary Labs was the next speaker. He delivered a great lecture about goat disease and disease testing. He offered suggestions to the breeders to learn to run their own fecal tests and draw their own blood samples and mail to the lab direct. This will save in cost and time.

The last speaker of the day was Jamie Ryan Ballif of Sleepy Hollow Farm in Virginia. She gave a working lecture on fecal tests. The McMaster technique was taught start to finish with fresh goat poop from the holding pens. Her handout included necessary supplies list, and one of many techniques used today. This was a good follow up to Bob Glass's recommendation to learn to run your own fecal. FEC and worm identification was included with questions about wormers, and current recommendations of multi-class dosing.

Donated auction items were next up for grabs. Frozen semen, puppies, frozen embryos, pecan pie, welded goat feeders, microchips, and others were up for bidding. Yes, you guessed it. I won the pie. I didn't know I was even bidding; this must be what they call muscle memory. It was over so fast. That was the tastiest \$65 piece of pie that I have ever had.

Sunday was the day of sales, workshops, and more casual movement of people to each area. Hoof Boss had a working display with training using cedar wood and safety glasses. Each participant had a discount coupon for a Hoof Boss in their goodie bag. There was a working class on hoof trimming and tips with how to work problem hooves. Workshops on using a punch for DNA samples vs. hair; and microchipping techniques

rounded out the morning.

Again, the hard work of the few in planning and setup was also left to them for dismantle and clean up, as the masses fled to catch flights or to hit the road ahead of the weather.

For me, this was a unique gathering that felt more like a Savanna family reunion than a weekend lecture and workshop. I hope others felt this way too. I have been waiting all weekend to take off the goat "tie of shame," but as I do... I feel sad. 🌸

TREVOR BALLIF and his wife, Jamie Ryan Ballif are Savanna breeders in Keswick, Virginia. Their niche has become genetic programs with original Savanna progeny. Trevor is a respiratory therapist working at the Veteran's hospital, and Jamie is a full-time farmer.

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