



Thoughts on Horns

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Martok

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Uzzi shows off her horns. Uzzi has horns and I don't. It isn't fair. If he wants to, Uzzi can head butt the cattle panel gate really, really hard and bend it. When I try I get a headache.

Most goats are born with horn buds deep in their heads, but their humans have them disbudded. That means the baby goats' emerging horn buds get burned with a really hot iron and their horns don't grow.

My horns got disbudded because I'm a buck (it was scary but not really all that bad). See, bucks like to bash things with their horns. Three Boer bucks lived here before I did and lots of things got seriously bashed. And some bucks get feisty during rut and bash their humans, so Dad said, "No more bucks with horns!"

Horns get caught in fences, too. When we were littler, Uzzi liked to put his head through the fence but then his horns got stuck. I got to use him for a punching bag—it was fun! But it would be dangerous in a big field if a predator came along. That's why most goats get disbudded.

Another reason dairy goats get disbudded is because horned does (those are girl goats) hook each other with their horns and sometimes tear each other's udders. And horned heads don't fit in milking stanchions very well.

But there are good reasons to have horns too. Goats should never be pulled along by their horns because horns sometimes break off and boy, do they bleed! But in an emergency, horns make good handles. The trick is to grasp the horn as close to the goat's head as you can, that way the horn isn't as likely to break.

Horns act as thermoregulatory structures too. That means they help the goat who's wearing them cool down.

According to a fancy paper called Thermoregulatory Functions of the Horns of the Family Bovidae, "A typical goat at ambient temperature of 22C and in relatively still air can lose about 2% of its total heat production through the horn."

That's why packgoat and harness goat owners usually let their goats' horns grow long. And that's why Uzzi and some of our other friends have horns!

Even Angel the sheep has horns. Aiah the calf has horns and so does Ludo the water buffalo. It doesn't seem fair. I want horns too!

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