

Carla Clark Carter

I was recently asked which of my stock would be the best for a beginner. I said I would write this for the group because I want to talk about and explain hybrid vitality. I love my new zealand whites. They are big girls, throw big litters and are just awesome meat bricks. I love my californians, they are awesome moms, will foster just about anything, they are great milk producers and can often raise up to 12 or 13 rabbits theirs or somebody else's.

So which is best? What should somebody get who is starting a small rabbitry. Well, it's really hard for me if you only want a trio. But then I recommend either a NZW buck and two Cali does; or a Cali buck and two NZW does. Why? Hybrid Vitality. Hybrid Vitality is a standard term used in all of livestock. It had a great definition, I wish I would have copied it down. Anyway, what happens when you cross breed, you get hybrid vitality. You get a cross of the two breeds, but you also get a special spark that occurs that causes the babies to be like super growers. They grow faster, more vibrant and are usually overall healthier than a pure of either breed. Taking advantage of hybrid vitality within my standard stock is what can get you to 5# in 8 weeks on most of my stock. If you wanted four does, I would then recommend a buck of each and two toes of each, that way you could cross each way for the hybrid vitality, and also have pures if you wanted, in case you wanted to sell some breeding stock as well. That is the basic concept and ask any questions if you have experience with hybrid vitality or questions about it or how it works.

The page below was provided by David James. It is straight out of a textbook on Animal Science. It explains hybrid vitality for sheep. I hope it helps you to understand better what I am trying to explain and why I like to utilize hybrid vitality for meat production.

Romney, Rambouillet, and Targhee breeds.

HETEROISIS IN SHEEP BREEDING

All of the meat-producing species rely on crossbreeding to improve productivity. However, the sheep industry has used crossbreeding systems very effectively for decades. Crossbreeding systems in sheep involve mating ewes and rams of different breed or breed crosses to produce offspring that are superior (due to heterosis) in performance to that of either of the parent stock. Systematic crossbreeding systems are advantageous because they utilize heterosis.

Heterosis, or hybrid vigor, for a trait is defined as the superiority of the crossbred individual relative to the average performance of the purebreds included in the cross. In general, crossbred individuals tend to be more vigorous, fertile, healthier, and grow faster than the average of parental stock that make up the cross. Traits that are lowly heritable show high levels of heterosis. Reproductive traits are a good example of a lowly heritable trait that shows high levels of heterosis. Moderately heritable traits show moderate levels of heterosis, such as the growth traits. Highly heritable traits such as fleece and carcass traits show little hybrid vigor. Average heterosis effects for the crossbred lamb and crossbred ewe are shown in Tables 9-12 and 9-13, respectively. The total effect of heterosis on the crossbred lamb is 17.8%; the effect of heterosis on the crossbred ewe is 18%. These advantages make it imperative for the sheep producer to use crossbreeding systems to improve the economic efficiency of the commercial sheep operation.