



The Standards of Care were developed over several years by a core group of llama and alpaca owners with input from experienced camelid veterinarians. These standards are available for use by anyone, including non-informed owners, animal welfare and state agencies etc. The documents provide thorough basic information on proper care and husbandry for camelids.

Camelid Industry Brief Overview

~ 300,000 camelids overall in the US:

- Registered Llama/guanaco/cross-breeds 157, 545
- Registered Alpacas 87, 546
245 ,091

Top 4 alpaca farming states:

OH, WA, OR, CA

Top 4 llama farming states:

OR, CA, TX, WA

Average herd size is less than
50 animals



Lifespan is 15-20 years. Uses: breeding, showing, fiber production, companions, animal therapy, pack stock (llamas), guardians for sheep/goats, other livestock.

Not all llamas or alpacas are registered; the ILR estimates upwards of 15% of llamas are probably not registered. The llama population is remaining stable; the alpaca population is growing.

(population data as of Sept. 2006. For current statistics see:

www.alpacaregistry.net

www.lamaregistry.com)

Minimum Standards of Care

Water – free access to potable drinking water at all times

Nutrition – adequate to sustain life and health

Shelter – may be natural or man-made

– provide animals relief from extreme weather (heat, cold, wet, windy)

Mobility – enough room to move and exercise freely



Animals must always have continuous access to potable drinking water.

Adequate nutrition appropriate to age and activity.

Shelter sufficient to provide protection from extremes of heat and cold.

Shelter must allow for animals to have their “personal space” to lie down or reasonably move about.

Minimum Standards of Care

Neglect – animals should be free from abuse/serious neglect

Safety – safeguard from injury/death within environment

Cruelty – safeguard from cruel treatment

Socialization – camelids need companionship of other camelids or other livestock

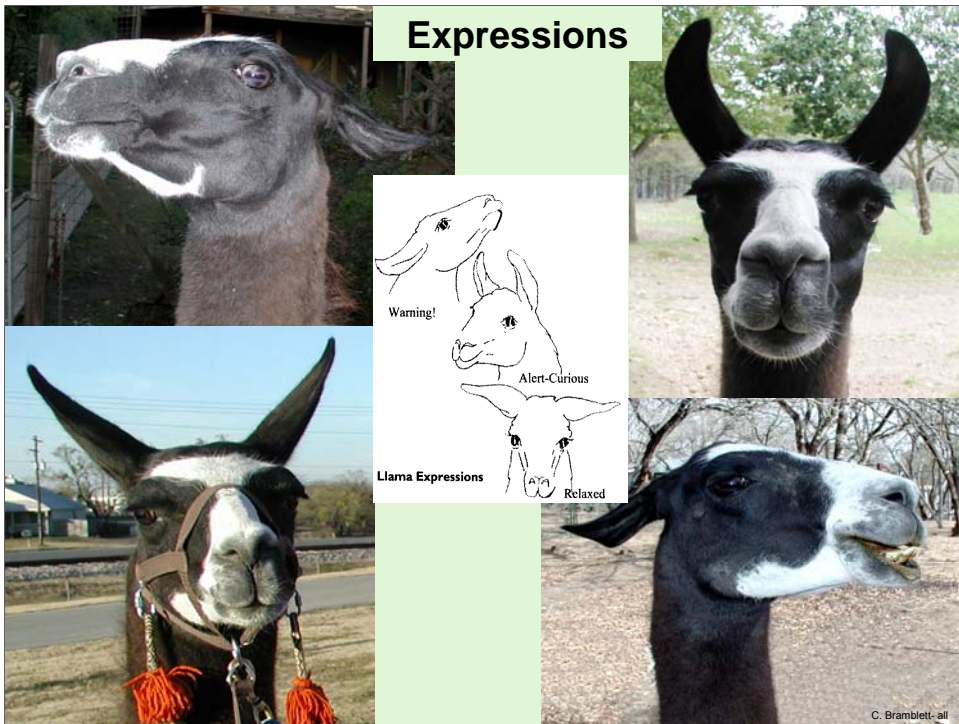


Animals need to be free from serious neglect, observable signs of which might be crippled ambulation from overgrown toenails, ingrown halters, or below minimum living conditions.

Animals should be reasonably safe from dangers within their living space and when traveling. They should also be reasonably protected from predators which can include packs of domestic dogs.

Safeguard animals from cruelty or avoidable suffering. One llama was kept in a small pen outside a bar in N. Dakota; was teased and tormented by drunk patrons. Reports of “cowboys” using llamas in roping practice.

Camelids are herd animals and need the company of either other camelids or compatible livestock. Single llamas with appropriate temperament can be good guardians for flocks of sheep or goats.



From the Recommended Practices: what's the mood of the llama?

These are the basic ear positions in camelids. From top left: ears back, and can be even further back than this, signals a territorial warning to others. Top right: Alert and interested.

Bottom left: relaxed, also listening to what's going on behind her.

Bottom right: spit face – has just been the recipient.

Recommended Practices - Nutrition

Continuous access to potable water

Daily access to clean, mold-free hay/nutritious pasture

Feed supplement – 10-12% crude protein for adults

Mineral source – free choice, loose texture is best

Feed orphaned crias via feeding tube or bottle to minimize human bonding

Animals must have freely available source of water; not have to break ice or eat snow in winter. Water should be cool to the touch in summer; lukewarm in winter.

If providing a supplement, lower protein is better for adults. Nursing mothers and growing youngsters may have 12-16% crude protein. May also reach these levels by mixing forages. Alpacas require slightly higher protein levels than do llamas – feed for individual's needs.

Free choice of loose mineral mix is very important. Use a mineral mix formulated for camelids and appropriate to their geographic region.

If necessary to bottle feed an orphaned cria, do so very carefully using a bottle or feeding tube to avoid unnecessary human bonding.

Monitor pasture for presence of poisonous plants.

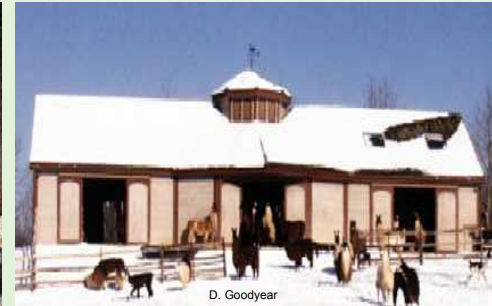
Recommended Practices – Physical Surroundings

Provide shelter appropriate to the climate

Regular manure removal

Fencing to safely contain camelids – barbed wire NOT recommended

Exercise animals daily if they must be confined for an extended period of time



Provide natural or constructed shelter to protect animals during extremes of weather. Provide heat/cooling sources as needed. Natural shade, wet sand, 30” and larger fans and adapt feeding routine to prevent heat stress. Provide indoor shelter during extreme cold.

Routine dung removal helps prevent parasite and fly problems.

Woven wire fencing at 5’ height is ideal; other types will work too. Barbed wire is not recommended.

Allow for separate pasture areas for each age/sex group: highly territorial males may need to be corralled separately; another area for weanling males. Females & geldings may live together.

Access to pasture/browse is preferred by the animals; supplement with hay as needed. Each animal needs personal feeding space to avoid conflict over food; assure lower status animals get enough to eat.

When animals need to be confined for an extended period of time, exercise them daily outside their stall.

Recommended Practices – Social Environment



Crias belong with their mothers

Deliberate “bottle babies” are unethical and inhumane

Geld males at the appropriate age:
18-24 months

A few unethical breeders will intentionally take newborns from their mothers and sell with a bottle. These animals are potential behavioral problems, especially males, as they bond to humans and do not learn how to be a llama. Crias should remain with their mothers until at least 4 months of age; 6 months preferred.

As mentioned before, provide herdmates – either other camelids or other species.

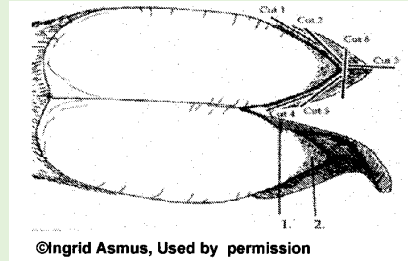
Geld males at 18 months to 2 years of age. Earlier gelding may result in improper closure of the growth plates in legs.

Never breed animals with genetic defects.

Recommended Practices – Routine Husbandry

Toenails must be kept trimmed

Vaccinate/deworm appropriate to the local conditions



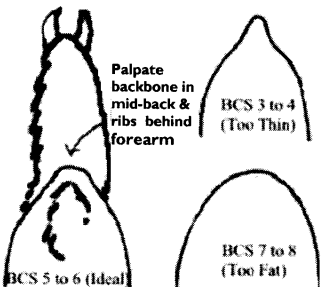
Toenails can grow rapidly especially on softer ground and must be kept trim for the comfort of the camelid. Use caution when trimming the tip of the nail to avoid cutting into the quick.

Set a vaccination schedule (CDT, rabies, leptospirosis, anthrax if needed) to fit the conditions in the geographic area per your veterinarian.

Deworm on the same basis to guard against meningeal worm, liver flukes and maintain overall health.

Recommended Practices – Routine Husbandry

BODY CONDITIONING SCORE (BCS)
For llamas and alpacas, BCS should be done by firm palpation of spine and ribs.



Palpate backbone in mid-back & ribs behind forearm


BCS 3 to 4 (Too Thin)

BCS 5 to 6 (Ideal)

BCS 7 to 8 (Too Fat)

Fiber can distort body contour and be misleading. Only by hands on BCS can one determine if the animal is fit, fat or thin.

Values based on a scale of 1-10



BCS 5.5

BCS 8.0

The chart illustrates body condition scoring (BCS) scale and where to check the animal.

Black llama is average; white llama is overweight.

Recommended Practices – Routine Husbandry



Rear



Spine

BCS 1.5

Extremely low body score. This is a case of starvation which was obscured by the amount of fiber on the llama. Only a hands-on assessment revealed the devastating condition of this animal. It died about one week after rescue.

Recommended Practices – Routine Husbandry

Shear to help prevent heat stress



Shearing is critical for heavily wooled llamas like the one shown, especially in warm, humid climates. Hand shears or electric clippers work well. May need to shear 2x – spring and fall – in the south and southwest. Monitor heat index (temp + humidity). Unshorn fiber will begin to felt next to the skin, blocking air movement to cool the animal. Know the symptoms of heat stress: open-mouth heavy breathing, panting, body temp. over 104, heart rate over 80/min., decreased appetite, staggering gait, seizures.

Hypothermia: newborns and elderly at most risk. Symptoms: low body temp., shivering, shallow breathing, decreased heart rate. Warm with deep straw bedding, blanket, warm water.

Light wooled animals or those in very cool climates may not need annual shearing.

Check for lice/mange.

Recommended Practices – Routine Husbandry



Dental care – cut fighting teeth in males

Monitor growth of incisors – trim / float if necessary as animal ages



Keep highly territorial or “alpha” males separated to prevent injuries from fighting

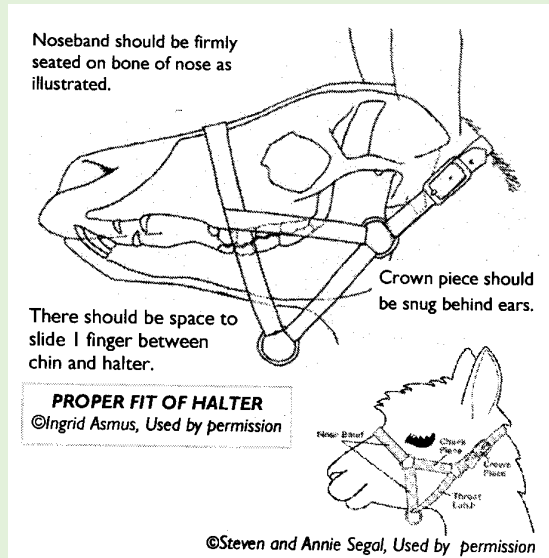
Adult males will develop upper and lower fighting teeth; these are very sharp and can inflict serious injuries to legs, ears and genitals of other camelids. The leg of this young male was injured by his father; they were kept in a too-small area and the male tried to drive the youngster out of his territory. Wound became infected and had lengthy recovery period. These llamas were rescued by SE Llama Rescue in N. Carolina.

Recommended Practices – Routine Husbandry

Proper halter fit is critical

Halter size changes as animal grows – adjustable are best

NEVER leave a halter on a camelid



Have halters to fit each age level in the herd. Halters with adjustable nose bands are best. Fit should be high up on the nose, right below the eye. If halter is too small or too large, it can slip off the nose bone to the soft tissue of the nose and restrict breathing.

Be able to catch and halter all animals; all should be taught to lead.

Recommended Practices – Routine Husbandry



Damage from
Ingrown halter



Too small

SELR – L. Hardcastle

Good fit



S. Bramblett



S. Bramblett

Top: animal whose halter was left on; see damage done by the ingrown halter. Permanent disfigurement.

Lower left: halter is too small

Lower right: good halter fit; arrows on photo indicate adjustable sections (plus crown piece).

Transportation

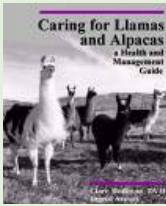


Owners should have some way to transport animals to the vet or in case of emergency.

Leave animals untied during transport; they will lie down when the vehicle is moving. Be sure all larger animals are taught how to load.

Have an emergency preparedness plan ready!

Resources



Online:

www.camelidcare.info

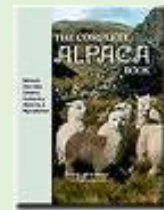
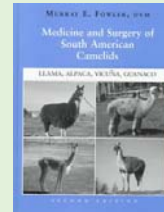
www.icinfo.org

www.merck.com

www.lamaregistry.com

www.alpacaregistry.net

Search the Internet for local camelid associations



All books listed can be ordered online from Amazon or other sources.

See the registries and local associations for owner contacts in your region.

Books:

Caring for Llamas & Alpacas: A Health & Management Guide

By Claire Hoffman, DVM & Ingrid Asmus

2nd ed. C. 1998

RMLA: <https://web41.mysecureserver.com/rmlacom/cfl.htm>

Llama & Alpaca Neonatal Care

By Bradford B. Smith, DVM, PhD; Karen I. Timm, DVM, PhD; Patrick O. Long, DVM

c. 1996

www.amazon.com or via camelid mail-order supply vendors

Medicine & Surgery of S. American Camelids

By Murray E. Fowler, DVM

2nd ed.; c. 1998

The Complete Alpaca Book

By Eric Hoffman

2nd Rev. Ed.; c. 2003

Donny Doon Press, Santa Cruz, CA

<http://www.bonnydoonalpacas.org/alpacabook.htm>

Acknowledgements

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