

## OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PASTURE

GALA Members who have retained their Newsletters will note that I have deleted some material from this version of the Observations05. I have also elected not to include Observations04. The deleted sections of this column and Observation04 dealt with grain for llamas. There have been many changes in grain formulations and in manufacturers since these columns were published. We have also changed to a different manufacturer. Accordingly I have deleted the material which I felt was out of date.

### **GALA Conference 2000**

We attended our first Conference before we acquired our first llamas and we have attended each one since then. This year we concentrated on the vet and fiber sessions. We look forward to the Conferences because they provide an opportunity to expand our knowledge, to meet old friends and to begin our annual review of our goals and objectives.

Each year, after the Conference, we take stock on what happened during the prior year and make plans for the upcoming year. The post-Conference period is an excellent time for this review because the Conference sessions are still fresh in our minds. We are now taking a very close look at our nutrition and breeding practices.

Before I go any further, I must mention that one thing that becomes abundantly clear each year at the Conference is that there are few areas where there is unanimity of opinion. Nutrition and breeding are not exceptions.

### **Nutrition**

At the Conference we were able to get hands-on training in body scoring from some of the best-known vets in the industry. Whenever I am in the pasture with our llamas I tend to perform an informal body score on the nearest llama. I will now perform a body score on each llama during its monthly weighing and I have modified my llama management database (developed using Microsoft Access) to store the body score along with the weight.

This year we obtained both first and second cut hay. Samples of both have been sent off for analysis. Once our hay has been analyzed we will take another look at grain and mineral supplements.

We are planning to expand our pastures over the next few years and we plan to increase the opportunity for our llamas to browse (as opposed to graze), since they are browsers by nature. Increasing the opportunity to browse should also help in parasite management.

I believe there is a danger in over-managing nutrition, which can be expensive and can possibly lead to over-conditioned animals. Our goal is to provide a

nutritional program that is as natural as possible under the circumstances permitted by our farm resources.

### **Breeding**

Up until the Conference we practiced hand breeding. We did not think of pasture breeding as being a viable alternative for us. Based on some observations made at the Conference we have decided to take a closer look at pasture breeding. Our decision was prompted by the observation that pasture breeding was more natural than hand breeding. Our pastures are distributed such that we can practice pasture breeding without upsetting our other intact males. Our practice is to wait at least one season before breeding-back our females. This eliminates a concern about having nursing crias with their mothers in a breeding situation.

We decided to experiment with a limited pasture breeding for the remainder of our fall breeding season. We placed three females with one of our studs. The females were our most difficult breeders when we attempted hand breeding. For example, one of them, when she went down, would position herself up against a corner of the breeding pen, leaving both the stud and I very frustrated. During this experiment we noticed a tranquility and serenity not experienced during hand breeding. One day, as we were preparing to go in for lunch, we heard orgling coming from the barn. The stud and the female with the corner-propensity were rapturously engaged (with no corner in sight). We quietly turned around and let nature take its course.

### **GALA Membership**

It has often been suggested that when we sell a llama to a new llama owner that we include a membership in GALA. I believe that this is an excellent idea worthy of our consideration. I would also like to suggest that you consider giving a GALA membership to your vet. The cost is small and the benefits are potentially large.