

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PASTURE

A New Year and New Beginnings

I am writing this column 35 hours before the dawn of the New Year and my thoughts, as I wander about our pastures, are on new beginnings and our (the human species) relationship with llamas.

Relationships

Early in December, while listening to the radio, I heard some commentary about humankind's relationship with other species. The word *relationship* struck a special chord with me because I have long felt the source of much intended and unintended animal and environmental abuse lies in the concept in much of western civilization that we have dominion over other species and the earth in general. My view of life and our relationship with other life forms, both flora and fauna, is more in keeping with that of the Native Americans, namely:

- There is an interconnectedness of life and we should act to protect that interconnectedness.
- All species and forms of life have as much right to existence as human beings. We should be concerned with the long-term welfare of life rather than with short-term exploitation or expediency for our sole benefit.

Holding this view does not mean that I believe that we should not use other life forms (or vice versa), but rather it does mean that any such use has its limitations. For example, when I cleared land to increase our pastures I did not clear cut, but rather I opened space giving breathing room for those trees that remain. The trees that were cut down are providing warmth this winter and their ashes are adding nutrients to our gardens. Our llamas will benefit from the shade from the trees in the new pasture and the trees, in turn, will benefit from the llamas keeping competing growth down and from the llama manure. If you think that other life forms do not use you, take a closer look at your relationship with your llamas. You might also wish to read *The Botany of Desire* by Michael Pollan, Random House, an interesting exposition on how plants use us.

Where am I headed with these thoughts? I have become increasingly concerned about the recent promotion of alpacas as an investment commodity. When the market collapses (which I believe to be inevitable) not only will the late investors be hurt, but also many of the alpacas acquired as a commodity will end up in less than desirable conditions requiring increased rescue activity by those who love these camelids.

Winter, Fire and Water

After the heavy snows in the spring of 2001 we have seen little in the way of meaningful precipitation. Many wells across Maine have gone dry and many more are expected to go dry this winter. Well-drillers are backlogged. Normally at this time of year my concerns are with seeing to those farm management chores connected with winter, see www.greenbriarllamas.com/Winter.htm, but this year I am more concerned about what to do if the drought continues. Fortunately we put in a deep well several years back. If the drought does continue we will need access to more hay as our pastures dry up early during the coming summer. Of equal concern is how to deal with a forest fire if one should occur in our area. We have been working to clean up our wooded areas to increase the health of our trees and to reduce the risk of fire but much remains to be done. Much of the wooded area surrounding our farm has been unattended for years and is at great risk for fire. I have found evidence of past fires in one section of our woods. We need to develop an emergency plan to see to the safety of our llamas. Do you?

On a Brighter Note

Several years back there was an article in a national llama publication to the effect that llamas are fairly unintelligent creatures. As might be anticipated there was considerable response to the article. Our llamas seem to have a knack of quickly grasping a variety of situations. For example, if I go out into the pasture before 7:00 AM they know that my schedule that day will not permit dispensing grain to those that normally receive grain (lactating and third-trimester females, crias), and while they may come to greet me, they do not head for the ramp to the upper barn where I dispense the grain. Sometimes this ability to assess the situation has its humorous side-effects. Whenever I move the trailer they know that either one of them will be traveling off (and then returning to) the farm or a new llama will be arriving at the farm. Yesterday, we used the trailer to move some furniture and other items from my mother-in-law's former home. This was the first time we had used the trailer for purposes other than transporting llamas. When I hitched up the trailer the llamas all kept a wary eye on me lest I come into the pastures to halter one or more of them. When we returned, they were all leaning over the fence to see the new kid on the block. Alas, there was only furniture. Such a disappointment!