

## OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PASTURE

### Mud! Mud! Glorious Mud!

The title for this column was unabashedly lifted from the refrain in *The Hippopotamus Song* by Michael Flanders and Donald Swan. When I started to write this column southwestern Maine was experiencing a very early and very soupy mud season leading me to think about the spring tasks ahead. It is now snowing and our winter snow drought may come to an end with a major storm at the end of the week ... but it is time to Think Spring!

At the beginning of the break from our winter weather I felt moved to go out and scoop the 110 foot long “communal dung pile” in one of the pastures frequented by our females. What little snow and ice we had was disappearing and it seemed to be a good time to attack the pile which started at the barn entrance and crossed the field to where I was putting out some of their daily hay rations during the winter. I brought in our tractor with its front-end loader bucket, navigating around the few areas where the ground was defrosting. I gathered enough “black gold” to cover one of my gardens. As I was standing in the pasture, basking in the warm sunshine I noticed that some of the more “nourished” areas of the pasture were beginning to turn green in front of my eyes. I had to beat a hasty retreat before the tractor created deep ruts in the rapidly thawing pasture. Further cleanup of the pastures will have to await the advent of spring.

It felt good both to get started with the spring cleanup of our pastures and with the process of nourishing of our gardens for the summer ahead. We use virtually all our manure for the nourishment of our gardens and the rebuilding of our pastures. We make “llama tea” to fertilize our seedlings and to help newly transplanted seedlings take root and grow. We also use it as part of our deer control program. More information about our use of manure can be found in two articles on our website:

*Confessions of an Organic Gardener, or, Nothing but the Straight Poop* and *More Confessions of an Organic Gardener, or, Toujours Manure*. They can be accessed at [www.greenbriarllamas.com/services.htm](http://www.greenbriarllamas.com/services.htm).

My thoughts then turned to other spring activities. We are expecting several cria this spring and it is time to inspect our birthing kit and to replace any out-dated items. It is also a good time to check out our first-aid kit. Last year it came in quite handy at an event we were attending. Several humans had decided to see what would happen if they put their fingers in the mouths of sheep.

The coats on our llamas seem unusually lustrous and fine as we are approaching spring. I cannot pinpoint the reasons for this. Some possibilities that occur to me are:

- Due to the very low wind chill temperatures we experienced this winter we increased the amount of grain fed to the llamas. The grain had been reformulated last year.
- Our minerals were reformulated at the beginning of winter.
- It is a reaction to the abnormally cold weather and/or a reaction to the fact that with the snow drought they spent almost every day outside this winter.
- The high winds we have experienced have tended to blow the chaff out of their coats.

Whatever the reason(s) we will shortly begin thinking about shearing the llamas. Last fall I had all our shears sharpened and adjusted while attending the Fryeburg Fair. I now need to check out the condition of our brushes, slickers and rakes.

Another spring activity is the checking out of our fence lines. At least one fence in a pasture we do not use during the winter was damaged by a falling tree.

The advent of spring is also heralded by the awakening of parasites from winter dormancy. It is a good time to have fecal analyses done so that any required control measures can be taken early. Similarly, it is time to restart meningeal worm control.

Spring is also a good time for the getting the llamas reacquainted with training. Those that are used for trekking or just local walks may need some conditioning. I find this activity particularly enjoyable.

Enjoy this change in seasons!