

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PASTURE

Misconceptions and Misperceptions

I am a big fan of the GALA Conferences. I believe that there is always something new to learn and, possibly, something old to unlearn.

When we acquired our first llamas we were advised that if you approached your kushed llamas and they did not get up, then something was medically wrong with them. Imagine our consternation when our llamas remained kushed the first time we walked amongst them. The truth of the matter is that if our llamas are kushed (and we are not carrying a halter) they see no reason to get up.

We frequently hear (from both alpaca and llama owners) that alpacas do not relate to their caretakers as well as llamas. I suspect that where this exists the reason is more environmental than genetic. After the llama market collapsed the relationship between the llamas and their ultimate caretakers changed ... the llamas were no longer a commodity, they had become companions. When I observe the children who have alpacas at the Maine Fiber Frolic I see a companion relationship. We have noticed that among our own llamas that those born on our farm are more laid back than those that we acquired. We do believe that there is a genetic component in a llama's temperament ... some lines are more laid back than others, but the learned component of temperament is stronger. In summary, I suspect that as small alpaca farms proliferate (particularly those with children) we will hear less about the difference between llamas and alpacas in their relationship with their caretakers.

We also hear frequently of the importance of not letting your animals (alpacas and llamas) invade your personal space. Associated with this is the importance of making sure that the llamas (alpacas) grow up knowing that they are llamas (alpacas). I agree wholeheartedly with these concepts. We make sure that our crias know what they are and we immediately correct any llama that attempts to invade our space. We believe that they should be companions but not pets, in the traditional sense. However, there is a difference between invading personal space and being invited to relate. When we train our llamas we are, in effect, also teaching them how to relate with us. In the end, our relationship with our llamas may be more laid back than some might feel is appropriate. Conversely, I sometimes wonder whether some get carried away in the other direction.

We also hear relatively frequently that llamas with unpleasant dispositions make better guards than those with more laid back (there is that term again) dispositions. I take exception to this view. I do not believe that guarding capability is related to disposition. I also have concerns about any llama that does not relate well to humans. Finally, a llama that tends to spit at humans is not a good PR representative.

In summary, we should frequently reevaluate what we have been told and what we have learned.

Lynd