

Introduction:

I was asked the following question by a free lance writer for Grit magazine (www.grit.com)

"I have noticed that you raise alpacas and other fleece animals. I was wondering how, in your opinion, alpacas compare – not only in terms of fleece, but also in terms of temperament and care. Basically, I want to answer the question "Why choose alpacas?" Janet Wallace - New Horton, NB

And here is my reply

October 12, 2011

Good day to you Janet,

I will answer your question with a why do you want an animal. Just as your writing give detailed talks on goats and the value of each breed. When I am asked which is better llama or alpaca I always ask why do you want an animal in the first place and then we can get to the correct answer that fits your need.

Are you looking for an alpaca for: Breeding, Fiber, Pet, companion to another type of livestock, 4H, or pasture control?

Each one of these would lead you down a different path to get to your end goal and then how passionate are you in any one of the desires noted above.

In general, alpacas are a 150 lb animal that requires the usual livestock care of annual immunization; depending on where you are located, a worming program; and annual shearing. Occasional teeth trimming and some need toe nail trimming. They should have shelter from the elements. Some you will find as in any animals prefer to be under cover some do not. Most will enjoy the choice. Whereas Lama's (family name including both llamas & alpacas) are grazers, they need to have access to anywhere from 3-6 pounds of feed per animal per day if your land does not provide that amount of feed source for each animal you are maintaining, then you need to supply hay. Here I feed Eastern WA orchard grass. I do not grain but they all do have access to granule mineral salts. They make special mineral salts for lamas but you can also use sheep salts.

Personalities, as in any and all creatures it varies. Each is unique and each has their own special likes and dislikes. And as in all things in life you benefit from the amount of effort you put into it.

In my case I have had llamas for 25+ years, alpacas for 4+ years and Pygora Goats for 7 years. Most of my llamas were bred at our various farms over the years and traveled with us to the new locations and will retire out with us; we do have a senior herd of llamas. And the personalities are all over the map. Some are loving and want to be

handled and some are no thank you, just put the food in place and you may leave. The alpacas have joined us since our hopefully final farm location and they are all non breeding girls. Each with a long story and none really handled much before arriving. All, in no time enjoy a good hug and have adapted to their new surroundings in a short amount of time. All of my animals usually come running when I call. The llamas & the alpaca's co-exist; the Pygora goats reside in an adjoining field.

Myths: They all spit, alpacas are not friendly, and llamas are wild..... as I stated earlier all are individuals, if you teach an animal that by handling them you are helping them in some way they will not resist and they will enjoy your presence. Yes they spit and it is a form of communication, just as dogs communicate with a growl and a cat with a hiss. A lama does so with a spit as a form of communication with in the herd as a last resort. They also use it as a teaching tool for the cria (baby). It is not uncommon to have a cria with a green covered fiber. The cria just as any young get into trouble and check all adults for milk, and if a step aside and a head movement is not enough then the adult will go to the next step. In 25 + years I have had the pleasure of spit 4 or 5 times and each of the times it was my own fault. I got in the middle of two have a family disagreement.

Fiber; llamas and alpacas both produce hair. If you have an animal that you are breeding repeatedly then you could be impacting the quality of that fiber. As in all things in life not all fibers are created equal and some lamas have nicer fiber then others. The micron count in the lama family can range from anywhere from the mid teens to the 40's. So if Fiber is your goal then you want to learn all you can about that particular animals fiber history. If you want an animal for a pet/ 4H/ field companion, then the fiber will not be as a concern but health and personality will be. And if you want an animal for breeding then you have lots of research to do, conformation, history, health, fiber etc...

One other point, lama's life span is approx 15 to 25 years, so this is a life style commitment and not a fad.

I do not know if I answered your question or just gave you more to think about, but I hope my words helped your writings.

Mary B Donaty

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