

Camelid Ownership

The basics

CAMELID HEALTH

information from the camelid community

If you're new to alpacas and llamas this sheet contains the basic information of caring for your new charges under New Zealand conditions.

Fences-

Alpacas and llamas generally respect fences. Standard sheep fencing is usually sufficient. Electric fences are not recommended, as a thick fleece can be a good insulator (they don't feel the shocks unless they touch the tape with their nose), and they can get tangled in electric tape, with potentially tragic consequences.

Safety in Numbers-

Camelids are herd animals. They cannot live alone. A non-camelid companion (sheep, goat, horse) is NOT sufficient. They must have another llama or alpaca as company. Two is the minimum, three is better. If possible, larger groups (five or more) tend to result in happier, calmer animals. Such groups provide more options for social connections.

Yards-

You must have a pen or yard where the alpacas and llamas can be confined. A pair of gates tied together to make a 3 x 3 meter pen in the corner of the paddock would be the minimum. Yards are vital when it comes time for shearing, injections, medical treatment, or anything else that they might rather avoid! Try to place the yards in a place where even reluctant animals can be herded easily. Regularly feeding the animals in the yards can help reduce fear.

Observation-

One downside of alpacas and llamas is that they are notoriously stoic- they hide it very well when they are feeling sick. Regularly observe your animals, learn what is normal for them. Look out for any sudden changes like: an abrupt change in dominance (the lead animal suddenly being picked on), laggards (animals that used to always arrive first, now lagging far behind), signs of discomfort (moaning, teeth grinding, kicking at stomach), animals unwilling to stand, or significant weight loss (low body score). There may be a few false-alarms at first as you learn about your new friends, but regular careful observation is the best way to detect a problem early when it can still be fixed. Keep records of your observations in your farm journal, they may be very helpful to your vet if an animal gets sick.

Feed-

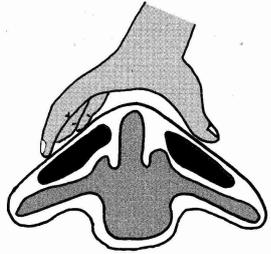
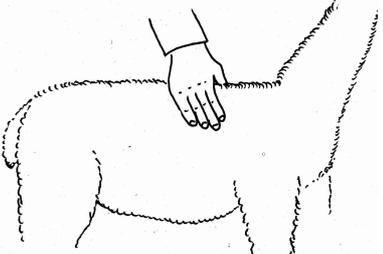
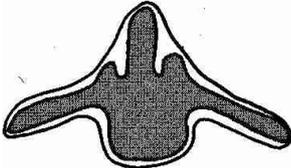
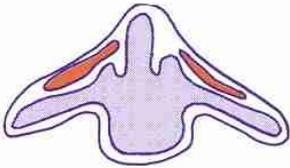
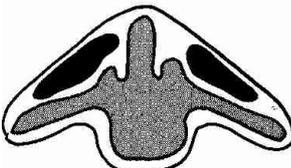
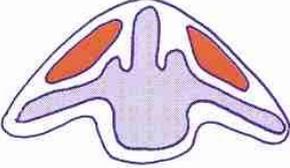
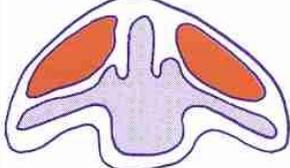
For most camelids in NZ grass is sufficient for all their dietary needs. Good quality meadow hay should be fed out when feed is short (winter), as long fibers promote proper digestion. Alpaca "nuts" and other processed food should only be used sparingly. Avoid grain and maize-based feeds, as they can result in dangerous digestive upset. (Warning- Zinc-containing nuts should only be fed during the FE danger period. Otherwise it can cause dangerous copper deficiencies.)

Dangers- FE

Facial Eczema is a risk everywhere on the North Island. It is caused by toxins in fungal spores which cause potentially fatal liver damage. The fungus grows on dead leaf litter during warm, humid weather. Avoid topping pasture. Even published "low" spore levels can be dangerous. Consider preventive measures such as supplemental zinc during danger periods. Talk to other owners in the area to ascertain your risk, and learn about useful defensive strategies.

Dangers- Poisonous Plants

Some plants are deadly poison. Two native plants, Tutu and Ngaio, are known dangers. Many garden plants (Oleander, Rhododendron, Azalea) are very poisonous. If you are not sure, treat any garden or ornamental plant as poisonous. Any burn or compost pile should be located where the animals can't get to it. (See the poisonous plants reference card for more information.)

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| <p>Routine Maintenance-</p> <p>Alpacas are relatively easy to keep, but they do require some routine maintenance .</p> <p><u>Shearing:</u> Alpacas need to be shorn once per year, in the late Spring or early Summer.</p> <p><u>Vaccination:</u> Once a year with 5-in-1. A 2ml sub-cutaneous injection for both adults and cria.</p> <p><u>Vitamin D:</u> Alpacas, especially young growing ones, can get Rickets (hypophosphatemia). Inject them with Vit D every 8 weeks during winter (May, July, September) at a dose rate of 2000 IU/kg weight. Ask your vet for the proper dose based on the brand used.</p> <p><u>Toenails:</u> Toenails can grow too long, especially on soft ground in winter. They can be easily trimmed when the animal is restrained for shearing. If they need to be trimmed more often this can be done with a small pair of hand-snips, be careful to avoid the quick at the tip of the toe.</p> <p><u>Drench:</u> (AKA "wormer") This should only be given if it is required. Animals with good BCS generally don't need to be drenched. Give 1.5 times the sheep dose, based on animal weight. Avoid Levamisole-based drenches. Talk to your vet about risks in your area, and about when you should drench.</p> | <p>Body Condition Score- The BCS is one of the best tools for tracking the health of a camelid. Long fibre can easily conceal a dangerously animal. A camelid much thinner than its mates may be wormy (internal parasites), or have some other ailment. Knowing your animal's condition is a powerful management tool. All camelids should have their BCS measured monthly, with the results recorded. On lush NZ pasture many alpacas are overweight or obese.</p> | |
| | <p>Check body condition by placing hand on the middle of the back and feeling the spine, as shown below.</p> | |
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| |  | <p>BCS1 - EMACIATED -very steep angle along spine & curves inward - ribs are very easily felt <u>Immediate intervention required</u></p> |
| |  | <p>BCS2 - THIN - spinal slope concave, more than 45 degrees</p> |
| |  | <p>BCS3 - OPTIMAL - about 45 degree angle along spine</p> <p>This is the ideal for adult huacaya-type alpaca.</p> |
|  | <p>BCS4 - OVERWEIGHT - convex shape between the backbone & upper ribs</p> <p>Ideal for adolescent huacaya alpaca under one year old.</p> | |
|  | <p>BCS5 - OBESE - backbone feels flat</p> <p>Normal for Suri-type alpaca, and all cria < 6 months old</p> | |