

In My **Opinion**

Breeding Up

A possible solution to the registration, import and ET woes

by Debi Garvin

It is no secret within the llama community that numerous huarizos have been registered as full llamas. Many of these came from South America with "unknown" ancestries. The first blatant crosses occurred in the early to mid nineties with the sudden appearance of the short bodied "super-woolies". These were largely crosses of huacaya alpacas and llamas. Although the crossbreeding was kept a "secret" in North America, it was widely known in South America that these animals were purposely being crossed for export to the US. The next big cross came with the sudden appearance of the "suri llama", another obvious cross but this time between the suri alpaca and a llama. All of the imports that passed screening were registered as full llamas, even though their ancestry was "unknown". As a result of these issues, ILR has closed the registry - at least until 2008. It can be debated on both sides whether or not the registry should be opened again to allow for imports, but regardless of the outcome, the llama community cannot afford another "fad" rush that involves crossbreeding of any kind.

With each fad in the past came an imported sire that possessed the new, much sought after qualities that were being heavily promoted and advertised. These sires, largely due to hype and advertising, were used extensively (as were their offspring), making a dramatic impact on the genetic pool of domestic llamas,



even though their lineage was "unknown." So we must all ask the question - how we can prevent this from happening again?

The American Boer Goat Association (ABGA) has a method for allowing "new blood" to enter the registry without having widespread effects on the population. To accomplish this they have three cat-

egories of registered goats, percentage, purebred and full blood as described below:

- Full blood – offspring of 100% full blood parents:

- Purebred Buck – Sire is registered full blood or purebred and dam is registered as 97 % (31/32 or greater)

- Purebred Doe – Sire is registered full blood or purebred and dam is registered as 94% (15/16 or greater)

- Percentage Doe – Sire is registered full blood or purebred and dam is registered as 88% or less (dam can be unregistered)

- Percentage Buck – Sire is registered full blood or purebred and dam is as registered as 94% or less (dam can be unregistered).

However, a percentage buck is eligible for a record of pedigree only - direct offspring from a percentage sire are not eligible for registration.

This process keeps any one animal without a known ancestry (especially males) from having a large influence on the registered population.

So, how could this work with llamas? First off, all llamas in the

current registry would have to be considered "full blood", even though we realize many aren't. But, we have to start somewhere (probably should have started in the early 90's before the large importations occurred). Then, all imports passing screening would be registered as percentage crosses (50%), since their ancestry could not be absolutely verified. The controversial part of this plan is that it would prevent ANYONE from making a lot of money with the "latest, greatest" imported sire, since these males would only be 50% and none of their direct offspring could be registered. An imported female's offspring could be registered as a percentage IF she was bred to a purebred or full blood llama. If a person wanted to bring in new blood, it would be primarily through the female lines, which would have a much reduced impact on the overall population.

In addition, only offspring from DNA typed sires should be eligible for registration. The argument against requiring DNA testing on all sires is the impact on the small breeder. This is a very weak argument. If a breeder cannot afford to DNA their herd sires, they probably cannot afford to be producing more animals.

How does ET fit into this equation? Embryo transfer is one area

that could easily be exploited and pedigrees easily falsified, since the female who is the mother may not even be in the US, much less the sire. By using the criteria above, all ET's that are imported would be registered (if they pass screening once born) as 50%. Also, all ET cria must have parentage confirmed through DNA testing on both parents to be registered.

Although probably not the perfect solution, the one I have outlined above would prevent another major "fad swing" in the llama community, as it would take several generations of crossing with registered full blood or purebred animals to obtain a "purebred" status. One can look around now and see how the "short and squatty" body type of the superwoolies has evolved more towards a normal llama in subsequent generations. Likewise, the "suri-llamas" have begun to lose a lot of their huarizo look and characteristics in the most recent generations, as the alpaca influence and genes have been diluted. Allowing these things to sort themselves out OUTSIDE of the registry will slow down, if not stop, any major changes to today's llama look. It may even remove the monetary incentives to make the crosses in the first place.



Cabernet's Pinot Blanc - ALSA National Grand Champion

Debi Garvin has a Masters of Science Degree in Animal Science with emphasis in Population Genetics and Animal Breeding from New Mexico State University. During her High School and College careers, she served on numerous 4H and FFA judging teams, gaining a critical eye and invaluable experience in how and why animals are placed in competitions. She has been breeding and raising various animal species (including horses, dogs, rabbits, sheep, pigs, goats and llamas) all her life, and currently raises llamas, Boer goats and Pembroke Welsh Corgis under the farm name Cabernet Creek Farms. She owns and bred the 1999 ALSA National Grand Champion, Cabernet's Pinot Blanc, and most recently the 2005 Western Regional Grand Champion MW Male and Grand Champion HW Female. She considers herself a small breeder, with 10-15 cria born yearly. Professionally, Debi is President of Pacific Rim Consulting and Director of the West Coast Quality Training Institute, providing consulting, auditing, and training services to pharmaceutical, animal health and pesticide manufacturers and research laboratories. She was the President of the Society of Quality Assurance, a multinational non-profit organization, and sits on the editorial board of the QA Journal.



“...the llama community cannot afford another “fad” rush that involves crossbreeding of any kind.”