

Digging Deeper: The New Buyers Litany of Questions

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Most of us have always been encouraged to ask questions. We are told, “no question is a stupid question unless you don’t ask it.” Despite the truth of this statement, sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we might not know the right questions to ask. As intelligent beings, we may do our homework, talk with others, research information on the subject, however, being novices in a particular area, despite our valiant attempts, we simply lack the experience to truly know... what are the right questions to ask.

We have received calls from new llama owners who purchased animals and who later, were faced with situations and circumstances they wished they could have avoided if they had known to inquire about particular details before making their purchase. Important information was not disclosed at the outset, either because of ignorance or the decision on the part of the breeder to not divulge information which might threaten a prospective sale.

Some who read this may feel this is more of an interrogation than an inquisition. However, when the discussion of ethics and questionable farm practices garners more and more attention, it is the hope of this writer that stringent evaluation and assessment of all farms and breeders become common place. It is in an arena such as this, that the buyers (whether old or new) can objectively evaluate standards and practices of a seller, which in turn, can lead to an informed and well thought out decision on the part of the buyer.

The following is a list of questions and/or observations to be made which sequentially takes the buyer from the initial stages of interest to a possible purchase. Many of these questions and/or considerations can also be used as a springboard for further discussion or clarification on the part of the buyer.

Individuals selling their llamas need to be assured that their animals are going to a safe environment to be informed about the animals they are purchasing and have the assurance of mentorship with the seller if desired.

Questions /Concerns to be Raised Prior to Purchasing Llamas

****Are the farm premises clean? Do poop piles appear to be picked up regularly and the areas limed?***

****Are llamas adequately pastured with safe fencing and housing?***

****Are water buckets filled with clean water?***

****Does the breeder have a complete first aid kit?***

****Look at the entire herd. What is your immediate impression of the type of care they are receiving?***

****Examine nails, teeth, and overall physical presence of the animals you wish to purchase.***

****Are the nails trimmed?***

****Does his/her coat have a luster to it?***

****Is the animal desensitized by the owner?***

****Is the animal halter broken and lead trained?***

- *Can the owner brush the llama, trim the toe nails on both the front and the back feet, check the mouth, etc. easily or with difficulty?*
- *Observe the owner catching the llama, putting on the halter and leading it away from the barn. Is it done easily or is the llama reluctant or hesitant?*
- *Are the llamas responsive to the owner?*
- *Ask the owner to critically assess the animals you are interested in. Ask for the animal's strength and weaknesses as well.*
- *Inquire about how that particular llama does in heat? Is he/she shorn yearly, every other year or not at all?*
- *Have there been instances of heat stress? If so, have the owner describe the incident and relate what was done to remedy it.*
- *What does the farm provide for their animals in both hot and cold weather?*
- *Ask to see medical records from birth to present.*
- *Did the llama have an IgG drawn after birth? If Yes, what was the IgG level?*
- *If the IgG was low, was plasma given with a repeat IgG later on?*
- *What was the weight gain of that particular llama during his/her first months of life?*
- *What inoculations are given in the first day? First week? First month? Second and third month?*
- *Are the parents on the property?*
- *Ask to see other siblings.*
- *How many crias has this farm birthed successfully? How many stillborns? Deaths? Assisted Deliveries?*
- *If purchasing a breeding/bred female, obtain the history on the mother regarding milk production, milking ability, mothering ability (attentiveness, etc) and birthing records.*
- *What guarantees does the breeder offer?*
- *Will the owner refund your money or offer you equal market value for a replacement if the purchased animal is unable to hold a pregnancy, adequately nourish her cria or has problems with the actual birthing process?*
- *Inquire about the parents and genealogy AT LEAST four generations back.*
- *Ask the owner if either the dam or the sire has given birth to or sired a cria with choanal atresia or other genetic defects (wry face, etc.). If there is any doubt as to the honesty of the disclosure, investigate further.*

- *If purchasing a prospective stud male, ask about the presence of genetic abnormalities in his line.*
- *If the male is unproven, what guarantees are in place?*
- *If he is a proven sire, ask for the pictures of his offspring and visit them if possible.*
- *If purchasing a male or female to compliment your breeding male or female, cross check generations between your male and female. All too often, buyers purchase a male and female with the intent to breed them as a pair and then later learn they both share the same grandparents.*
- *Visit the farm more than once and work with the animal(s) before the actual purchase.*
- *Ask the seller to supply you with references from: previous sales, other breeders, and his/her veterinarian. A farm's veterinarian is probably the most valuable reference you can get. The veterinarian has knowledge of herd management practices or lack thereof, and is cognizant of the seller's knowledge and sophistication of both cria and elder care.*
- *Does the seller provide you with printed materials based on recommended timelines for inoculations, deworming, etc. Are you provided with applications for state and national llama associations to join?*
- *Has the llama traveled in a trailer or vehicle for other types of transport?*
- *Does the seller offer a buy back clause if the animal, for whatever reason, does not adjust to the new placement or after a short time, a buyer realizes he/she cannot invest the time into the care of the animal? Just how much does the seller "stand behind" their animal?*
- *What does the seller offer you as a new buyer in terms of follow up? Will they visit or phone check on the llama's adjustment? If you are relatively new, will they be available to work with you in training, desensitizing, learning to give shots, shearing, troubleshooting problems which may arise, etc. Talk with others who have purchased from this farm to assess the degree of involvement which carries through after the sale.*
- *If purchasing an animal advertised as a trained pack llama, request a pack trip (preferably overnight) with the owner and llama. Determine the frequency and length of pack experiences, the amount of weight carried, etc.*
- *Are the terms in the contract spelled out clearly? Ask to see a sample contract prior to any sale.*
- *Is the seller current in his/her knowledge of llama medicine, research, training, etc.?*
- *Evaluate the seller with a critical eye. Now that you have answers to your questions begin your decision process. Think about it, talk about it, investigate thoroughly prior to any purchase.*

Accountability along with ethical breeding and selling practices are in demand. A reputable breeder who stands behind their animals and their farm should have no difficulty with questions of this nature...and quite frankly, should endeavor to seek out an interested party who would be willing to investigate at this level of commitment.