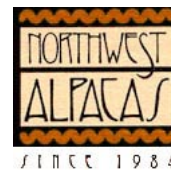




Being The Best, Alpaca Registry, That We Can Be

By Mike Safley
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The U.S. Army wants to be the best that they can be. The Marines are looking for a few good men. As the Alpaca Registry marches into the future, it needs to answer to these same ideals. How do we assure that our registry contains the world's finest bloodstock and how many recruits, or imports, do we allow to join our ranks?

The military analogy doesn't stop with the Marines and the Army. When I joined the U.S. Navy at seventeen, on the first step of my journey into the Vietnam war, I had to pass a physical, health tests, and fit within a breed standard --meaning I couldn't be too tall or too short, be bow-legged or flat footed, I had to see well and be generally fit enough to meet future challenges. The Alpaca Registry should create many of these same standards as qualifications for admission into their membership.

When deciding how to be the best at anything, an examination of the competitors in the given field is instructive. In the case of the Alpaca Registry, other breed registries should be examined for their strengths and weaknesses. The American Kennel Club, better known as the AKC, was formed 110 years ago and is one of the oldest breed registries in the United States. They were recently the subject of an extensive examination in the pages of Time magazine.

The Time article pointed out some of the strengths and many of the weaknesses that are present in the operation of the AKC registry today. By any measure, the American Kennel Club is big business. Last year their gross income approached \$29 million and they held 1,177 dog shows in which 1.3 million dogs competed. In 1992 alone, they spent \$1.675 million on education and research.

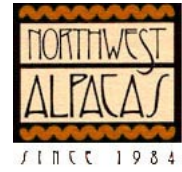
The AKC does a good job of putting on shows, training judges, and promoting themselves. They also efficiently issue tens of thousands of pedigrees each year. An AKC dog sells for 10 to 20 times more than a purebred dog that is not registered. They obviously create market value for their members. But that's the good news.

The bad news is that, according to Time magazine, over 25% of all purebred dogs have genetic defects. "The AKC keeps track of purebred pedigrees, but it requires no proof of good health," says Michael Fox, a veterinarian and vice-president of the Humane Society of the U.S. He adds, "The best use of pedigree papers is for housebreaking your dog. They don't mean a damn thing. You can have an immune-deficient puppy that is about to go blind and has epilepsy, hip dysplasia, hemophilia, and one testicle, and the AKC will register it." Not a pretty picture, if you believe Fox.

On one hand, the registry serves the owners quite well, enhancing the market value of their dogs. On the other hand, the dogs are apparently an unhealthy, genetic mess. Throughout this process, the AKC and the people who administer it seem to do quite well.

Horse registries are generally thought to do a good job for their breeds. The Alpaca Registry borrowed heavily from the Morgan Horse Registry when it was created. Most bloodstock registries for cattle and horses have a screening process which is used to eliminate health and genetic problems. Breed standards are also used as a basis for admission and rejection to a particular registry.

The Appaloosa Horse Registry is highly regarded by Appaloosa owners. The burden of proving the eligibility for registration lies exclusively with the applicant. Horses that do not have identifiable Appaloosa characteristics, such as coat pattern, mottled skin, white selera, or striped hooves, are



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routinely rejected for registration. A horse is not eligible for registration that has draft, pony, albino, pinto, or paint breeding. For a horse to be registered as an Appaloosa, it must have registered parents as specified by the registry. In other words, it is a closed registry.

Texas Longhorns are vigorously screened and health tested prior to registration. A veterinarian must certify on behalf of registry applicants the animal has no genetic defects and that the subject Longhorn is free of brucellosis, tuberculosis, 5 leptospirosis, vibriosis, and trichomoniasis. A bull that has been previously registered as an artificial insemination Certified Sire can be de-certified if his progeny have verified genetic defects.

Tom Simmons has been the breeder of over 40 National Grand Champion Appaloosa horses and operates the Celebrity Alpaca Auction in Oklahoma City. I asked Tom how the horse industry dealt with imported animals. "We never saw many imports, American horses are considered the finest in the world," says Tom, "and we were always net exporters." Wouldn't it be grand if American Alpaca breeders could stake the same claim!

CURRENT STATUS

The Alpaca Registry is currently a closed registry. For an Alpaca to be automatically eligible for registration, it must be the progeny of a registered dam and sire. Unregistered Alpacas are only admitted to the registry if they are approved by the Alpaca Registry Screening Committee (ARSC). To qualify for screening, the owner must submit to ARSC, fiber samples, pictures, physical data such as height and weight, and a veterinarian's certificate on each Alpaca, which discloses any genetic defects. ARSC then reviews this material and decides whether to admit the animal to the registry or to reject its application.

PROPOSED CHANGES

More recently, ARSC has held discussions with the ILR Board of Directors to decide whether changes to the screening process are in order. The proposed changes being discussed include the establishment of a listing category for previously unregistered Alpacas. These proposed rules would conform with the listing and screening rules currently in place for llamas. Other changes being discussed involve more strict screening criteria and could include health testing, to better insure that imported Alpaca would not pose a health risk to our domestic herds.

There has been considerable recent debate on the virtues of "listing" previously unregistered animals with the registry versus actually screening the animals into the registry with full registered status.

Before discussing the pros and cons of this change, I thought a working definition of these terms might be in order.

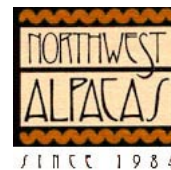
- Listing: The proposed process or the means of entering an Alpaca with unregistered parents on the books of the Alpaca Registry. The listed animal would not have registered status and would be screened before its progeny would be eligible for screening and registration. Each cria would need to be screened before being registered. Any Alpaca would qualify for listing, none would be rejected.
 - Screening: The process ARSC uses to determine whether or not an Alpaca, whose parents are not registered with the ILR, should be registered. Any Alpaca that fails to pass screening is not registered.
- First the pros, or positive, arguments for creating a listing category for Alpacas. To begin with, you must

understand that most unregistered Alpacas which currently apply for registration with the registry are imported. The proponents of listing cite the following reasons in their advocacy of a listing category:

- The process ensures that the genealogy of all Alpacas applying for registration can be recorded and tracked, including those which subsequently fail the screening process.
- Imported animals would be of less value as a result of their listed versus registered status. This would be due to the fact that any offspring the imported animals produced would need to be screened before they could be registered. In other words, a cria of a listed dam or sire would not automatically be eligible for registration. In fact, the cria could be rejected by the screening committee and, therefore, would only be listed with the registry. This, in theory, would reduce the value of a listed Alpaca.
- Listing would protect the genetic integrity of Alpacas within the registry by requiring that offspring of listed animals be screened, therefore eliminating any cria with genetic defects from accomplishing fully registered status.
- That the listing process would encourage importers to import only the highest quality Alpacas, since the lesser quality animals might not pass the ARSC screening requirements and, therefore, would be worth less money.

The alternative to creating a listing class is to screen imports and either accept them or reject them for registration. The arguments against creating a listing class include the following:

- Listing does not address the health issue. The health of imported Alpaca should be thoroughly researched and documented prior to qualifying for registration. The bottom line is imported Alpacas should not be listed or registered if they are not proved to be healthy.
- The burden of proving the health and quality of imported Alpacas should rest with the importer, not the subsequent buyer of a “listed” animal. If an unregistered Alpaca is found to be defective or unhealthy, the importer should suffer the consequence, i.e., non-registration. This should occur prior to its sale to the public.
- Rules and regulations need to be clear and result in Alpacas either being accepted into the Registry or refused registration. Registered Alpaca would be clearly superior in the market place. Unregistered Alpacas are worth very little today and we should work to maintain this distinction.
- ARSC should impose qualitative screening standards on Alpaca seeking to be registered. These requirements should include micron count, fleece weight, testicle size, and conformation. Animals which fail to meet these standards should not be registered or have any status with the registry, including listing.
- Many Alpaca currently in the import pipeline could immediately take advantage of the listing procedure and be available for sale. Off-shore screening and stringent health testing would slow this process. Alpaca which cannot pass ARSC screening requirements should remain in their country of origin.



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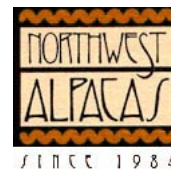
The argument over listing versus full registration is largely one of form over substance. The substance of this debate is screening. Listing is the form or status by which an animal will be recognized within the registry. If listing were adopted, an Alpaca could be listed by merely paying \$40, sending in pictures, and establishing proper identification. No Alpaca would be rejected for listing, but on the other hand, any animal could fail the screening process. Therefore, screening is the substance or meat of this matter and screening is where we should focus our attention.

The current screening process involves pictures, fiber samples, and a genetic defect disclosure form. The changes or additional requirements being proposed by the AOBA Health Committee and a number of industry participants, include the following:

Minimum Phenotypic Requirements Necessary To Qualify For Screening And Registration

- Fleece micron count not to exceed the following schedule as determined by laser scan and documented in the form of a histogram:
 - o Age 1 year 22 microns
 - o Age 2 years 25 microns
 - o Age 3 years or greater 27 microns.
- Successful completions of veterinarian report certifying a total absence of genetic flaws per the exam certificate.
- Proof of compliance with the Health Protocol as required by ARSC.
- Minimum height at withers 32 inches. Minimum body weight 125 pounds.
- Minimum testicle size 1 1/2 X 2 inches.
- Minimum 12-month fleece weight as follows:
 - o Age 1 year 4 lbs.
 - o Age 2 years 6 lbs.
 - o Age 3 years or greater 6 lbs.

NOTE: 12-month fleece weight must be documented by an ARSC employee.



List Of Disqualifying Genetic Qualifications/physical Traits:

1. Ectopic testicle(s) (lack of testicles in scrotum)
2. Misshaped vulva (evidence of hermaphroditism)
3. Polydactyly (one or more accessory digits)
4. Syndactyly (fusion of two normal digits)
5. Parrot Mouth (dental pad protrudes 1 cm or more beyond the lower incisors)
6. Undershot Jaw (roots of central incisors protrude beyond the dental pad)
7. Weak Fetlock (pastern or fetlock touches the ground when walking)
8. Umbilical or scrotal hernia
9. Heart Murmur (description of murmur)
10. Gopher Ears (short stubby, pointed ears)
11. Sickie Hocking
12. Cow Hocking
13. Knock Knees

ARSC has recently appointed an advisory committee (AAC) to study appropriate changes to the current screening requirements. Eric Hoffman and David Schieferstein are co-chairs of this committee. The results of this committee's work will be considered by ARSC as they decide what new screening requirements for unregistered Alpacas might be appropriate. The potential for positive results from this process are enormous.

IMPORTED ALPACA

New screening requirements, if implemented, would go a long way toward guaranteeing that any future imports admitted to the Registry would be high quality, healthy Alpaca who would serve to upgrade the stock of our domestic herd. If new screening standards were implemented and revised upward over the years, imported Alpacas would have to be of ever increasing quality to be marketable. American breeders would soon gain the distinction of having the world's finest Alpaca.

The crux of our registry debate, in my opinion, should not be whether we list inferior Alpacas, but should be concentrated on registering only the highest quality Alpaca. The registry would then be in the competitive position to define the value of registered Alpaca. Anything less would be of lesser comparative value.

FUTURE CHANGES

The Alpaca industry deserves a registry that is a useful tool, which assists breeders in making good decisions. The data base is the essence of the registry and it could be configured to produce meaningful information on such subjects as herd sires, fleece color, and fiber fineness. Registry information could also be used for qualified research projects to the benefit of all Alpaca breeders.

The Australian Alpaca Registry is in the process of recording performance data on each animal which will allow, as the data base grows, the establishment of "Breeding Value Expectations." This information would be computer analyzed and used to select for the most productive animals. The initial trait to be analyzed, in addition to the standard pedigree information, will be color. The Australians have selected 20 colors for inclusion in this study.

Another Australian innovation is the creation of a certified sire program. The concept here is to have the males, used in an outside or off-farm breeding programs, certified as free of genetic flaws. The Alpacas would have to pass genetic screening before the owner could offer to sell stud service to females from another breeder's farm.

Art Kennell, who heads up the International Lama Association's Research Committee, has proposed a similar program for llamas, which he believes would reduce the potential for high profile, super-sires to spread undesirable genetic traits. Kennell's concept would require the progeny of these super-sires to be screened for genetic defects. This information would be available from the registry to people who might consider using the subject sire. This program would be analogous to other livestock industry programs that feature premium males who are often used as the source of semen for artificial insemination (AI) breeding.

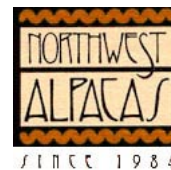
Phillip Spoenberg, of the American Rare Breed Conservatory, has suggested, in a paper presented to the ILR, that the Alpaca registry create a category for super fine Alpaca. These animals would be certified through micron testing as having very fine, and therefore, commercially valuable fleece. The merino sheep breeders in Australia have a similar program for identifying select merino stock.

Any of these ideas would allow Alpaca breeders to exploit the registry's database for the good of the industry. We need to be thinking about innovative ways to use our registry. The original predicate of the Alpaca Registry was to make it the most technologically advanced and sophisticated livestock registry possible. Alpaca breeders should continually advance this concept.

TO PROTECT AND TO SERVE

Ideally, the Alpaca Registry will act to protect the domestic Alpaca herd from health risks and to serve the members by providing the information necessary for good breeding decisions. The registry should also act to enhance the market value of their breeders' animals.

The health protocol proposed by the AOBA Health Committee, if adopted by ARSC, would go a long way toward insuring against the health risks of imported Alpacas. The screening process can also be used to safeguard against genetic defects being introduced into our herd.



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The registry currently does an excellent job of tracking pedigrees and maintaining a data base. There will need to be changes in the way the registry operates if the industry decides that protecting the market value of registered Alpacas is a legitimate goal. For such a goal to be implemented, the registry will need to be funded at a much higher level than it has been in the past. The governance of the registry might also need to be expanded to include more of the members in its strategic decisions.

I believe the registry should immediately impose a large fee upon the screening of imported Alpacas. The fee could be anywhere from \$500 to \$2,500 per animal. This fee could generate several hundred thousand dollars over time. The funds collected could pay for ARSC administration, advertising, and research.

The Alpaca Registry should begin promoting the value of owning registered animals. Advertising could be used to educate the buying public to the fact that registered Alpacas are healthy and genetically superior. Another benefit of owning registered Alpacas is that they are the only Alpacas which can be shown in the Alpaca Llama Show Association (ALSA) shows. People who purchase unregistered Alpacas are unable to show them, which also makes them more difficult to promote and sell.

Advertising by the Alpaca Registry could be reinforced by breeders who could advertise that they sold only registered Alpacas. A breeder placing an ad in *Alpacas* magazine or *Alpacas International* would include the registry logo and the pledge, "Selling only ILR Registered Alpacas." Collectively, Alpaca breeders could work to establish the name brand value of registered Alpacas.

The import fees could also be used for research projects. New ways to use the registry data base to the breeders' benefit could be developed and funded. Research could be undertaken to determine the highest and best use of Alpaca fiber. The registry could fund the development of a TB test, which, if accepted by the Canadian health authorities, would open the Canadian market to American breeders. Properly funded, the Alpaca Registry could work wonders for their member breeders.

The future of our registry is now. We need to make good strategic decisions about the registry's role over the next ten years. We need to either expand ARSC to include additional elected members or support ARSC by adding a permanent ARSC Advisory Committee similar to the one recently appointed.

We also need to determine the exact role of the registry. Should it include the creation of added value for registered Alpacas? Once this is decided, we need to look at the issue of listing versus registration. Value is most often attributed to scarce objects or commodities. By denying inferior animals any status with the registry, those Alpacas which were admitted would be of more value. A registered animal could be clearly defined and promoted.

The debate over the registry is being sharpened and the questions being addressed will be answered soon. The sooner importers know what to expect, the sooner any new rules adopted by ARSC will have affect. Our market can be strong for many years to come if we make good decisions today.