

Camelid Community 2007 Report “Celebrating Diversity, Sharing Goals”

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Radisson Hotel, Kansas City, MO

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Background and History

Camelid Community is the only national forum that offers the opportunity for dialog among representatives of national, regional and local camelid organizations as well as interested individuals and owners, providing a unique opportunity for an assessment of the “state of the union” of the camelid world. In the 1990s, the International Llama Association (now defunct) sponsored an annual Llama Assembly, the last of which was held in Colorado Springs in 1997. Representatives of a number of llama and alpaca organizations got together to host Llama & Alpaca Symposium in Kansas City in 1998, a highly successful and representative event. No group or combination of groups sponsored a similar national gathering in 1999. Feeling a need to see such a gathering held on an annual basis, several members of the Llama Association of North America tried getting it going again by hosting a Lama Community in 2000 in Kansas City. Though numbers were few at first, attendance grew as hosting and facilitating rotated among various groups and individuals. At the 2004 event the group voted to change the name to Camelid Community to better reflect the background and interests of attendees. Unlike most conferences, Camelid Community’s agenda is set by participants, and those unable to attend also are encouraged to submit proposed agenda items.

Strengths and Weaknesses Listed

Camelid Community 2007 got off to a solid start in its opening session with a candid sharing of our community’s weaknesses as well as strengths. By stressing how much more the llama and alpaca industries have in common with one another than not, organizers emphasized where we already work together as a true camelid community and the need for continued collaboration. Friday night’s exercise asked groups not only to list the strengths and weaknesses of their respective llama or alpaca industry, but also for the camelid community as a whole. Answers were open and candid and set the stage for the rest of the weekend, encouraging everyone present to participate and contribute. Attendees came from all over the country, from California to Massachusetts and many points between, and both llama and alpaca organizations were represented. National, regional and local groups were included, as well as interested individuals.

Rescue and Welfare

The attitude the camelid community has toward rescue and intervention was listed as a weakness, especially as compared to the attitude held by other animal industries (horses and dogs in particular). It was felt that “embracing” rescue efforts should be seen as an opportunity for the camelid community, and one of the ideas suggested was Halter Donation Stations set up at local, regional and national llama and alpaca shows. The donated halters would be used in camelid rescue and welfare situations across the country, including donating to local animal control officers and existing rescue organizations.

In an attempt to help educate people and keep many rescue situations from developing in the first place, the National Llama Intervention & Rescue Coordination Council (IRC Council) is putting together a plan recommending how to reach various audiences with the specific camelid education they need. The first module is designed to help educate animal control authorities and will be sent to llama and alpaca organizations by late fall 2007. Additional modules are being put together for other audiences, such as new owners, the general public, etc.

The IRC Council also plans to send organizations a survey designed to assess camelid welfare needs across the country.

Educational efforts are being made by camelid organizations and individuals in various regions to help reduce the number of rescue situations created by lack of knowledge. Several Camelid Community attendees described some of those efforts. Marc Page, who was representing the Greater Appalachian Llama & Alpaca Association (GALA), shared copies of a simple single-page handout called "*A Guide for Basic Llama Care*". The brochure is printed in larger quantities and distributed at sales barns, auction houses, feed mills, etc., to try and reach prospective buyers before they bring a llama or alpaca home. It provides basic care and handling tips designed to prevent the health and behavior problems that too often occur when a totally uneducated buyer leaves a sale barn with a llama but no information on what to do when they get home. Contact information for state and regional camelid organizations is provided, as well as titles of several camelid care books.

Another educational tool available to the camelid community, a llama and alpaca standards of care Power Point presentation was given by Karen Conyngham. It covers the main points provided in two written standards of care documents presented at Camelid Community 2005 and is available for downloading at www.camelidcare.info. The two care documents also are available on the same web site, but attendees complained the documents are not being widely distributed because there are problems in printing them from the site. Karen will work with those involved to make the documents more accessible. Participants agreed that the contents of the documents were good, but they need to be easier to print if they are to be more widely used.

Government Relations

Attendees listed the camelid community's involvement in the established government relations network at the federal level as a real strength, but they also felt other areas involving government relations were a weakness—especially biosecurity, the threat of an infectious disease outbreak and lack of support for animal ID and premises ID. Karen Conyngham gave a Power Point presentation on biosecurity for camelid owners that provided an excellent overview of biosecurity practices that should be followed by all camelid owners. Most attendees, however, agreed that far too few camelid owners follow even some of the practices, let alone all of them. They also agreed that the biosecurity practices as presented could go a long way toward heading off the transmission of infectious diseases. (If you wish a copy of the biosecurity Power Point presentation, contact Karen at 72040.3361@compuserve.com. It is a short PPT file and can be sent by e-mail.)

Karen, who is the International Llama Registry's (ILR) representative to the U.S. Animal Health Association (USAHA), is also a member of the Camelid Working Group (CWG). She provided an update on the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) and reported that the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has no plans to make participation in any component of NAIS mandatory during the remainder of this administration. She did caution camelid owners, though, to be aware of what is required in their state because individual states may move forward with an animal identification plan as they deem necessary. At this point emphasis by both USDA and the states is still on premises registration rather than individual animal identification.

Research and Medical Issues

Though the good research entities available to the camelid community, as well as our support of medical research, were listed as strengths, providing funding for more projects was seen as a weakness for our community. Attendees were highly supportive of the Llama Medical Research Group (LMRG), Morris Animal Foundation (MAF) and the Alpaca Research Foundation (ARF), all of which provided written reports for Camelid Community 2007. One of the requests at last year's Camelid Community was to find "additional qualified and committed people to participate on the LMRG and camelid organizations willing to provide financial support" for them. That was accomplished with the addition of Dr. Karen Pihera, sponsored by the Southern States Llama Association (SSLA),

and Dr. Joy Bishop-Forshey, sponsored by the Ohio River Valley Llama Association (ORVLA). A third new member also may soon be added.

One of the research projects included in ARF's report to Camelid Community that should be of special interest to llama and alpaca owners is the development of a teaching model for venipuncture and intravenous catheter placement by Dr. Jeffrey Lakritz of Ohio State University and Dr. Claire Whitehead, formerly of OSU. The model is intended for sale and distribution to veterinary schools and other interested parties virtually at cost. Camelid owners who have watched a veterinarian try to find the vein in their animal's neck will be happy to know that a realistic model on which to practice is now available.

Organizational Problems and Ethics

"Strong local and national organizations" was listed as one of the strengths for the camelid community as a whole, but organizational conflicts and politics topped the list of threats to our community. Participants discussed declining memberships, a breakdown in regional organizations and a general lack of cooperation and collaboration as they pointed to the problems of personal agendas, the baggage of history and fear of change. In an attempt to get at some of these problems, the group suggested organizations not only review their mission statements, but also make them accurate and live up to them. The group also felt a need to encourage people to "develop a problem solving mindset".

Nearly everyone present, llama and alpaca representatives alike, had stories to share of "unscrupulous breeders and sellers," some of them members of reputable camelid organizations. Ethics can be tough to discuss in our local and national groups, but participants felt we as a community have a critical need for responsible breeding practices—a need to avoid overbreeding, indiscriminate breeding and leaving too many males intact.

Education and Communication

Two words came up again and again throughout the exercise on industry strengths and weaknesses: education and communication. This was true in the lists for the individual llama and alpaca industries, as well as for the camelid community as a whole. The most critical need for education and accurate information seemed to be with new and potential owners, in part because of the prevalence of misinformation, especially on the Internet. Several participants noted that guard llamas in their regions suffered heat stress this summer because owners didn't realize they needed to be shorn. Suggestions were discussed on how to reach camelid owners who don't belong to llama or alpaca organizations (and there are many such owners), and attendees were encouraged to work with their associations to implement some of the suggestions. Kathy Lamphear of the Missouri Llama Association volunteered to contact sheep and goat associations and write articles for their publications on caring for guard llamas.

The concern was raised that because many people are becoming llama and alpaca owners at retirement age, more attention needs to be given to helping them plan for what happens to their animals when they die or become unable to care for them. It was suggested that sellers include information on estate planning for camelids in all new owner packets so owners understand the realities of being responsible for animals that are so long lived. Participants also felt it was wise to help new owners set goals, getting them to think about why they want llamas or alpacas and what they want to do with them, in order to prevent them from getting in over their heads.

Communication has been a constant theme at Camelid Community gatherings, and Camelid Community 2007 was no exception. Participants this year stressed the need for more cross communication between the llama and alpaca industries, as well as the need for the camelid community as a whole to communicate more with other livestock and companion animal industries. In addition, it was felt camelid organizations need to do a better job of communicating with their own members and with each other. Attendees also said we need to cooperate and communicate more with the agricultural community in general, including the Extension Service. Some of the

communication “take aways” from this year’s gathering included communication about Camelid Community itself: create an information sheet on Camelid Community for distribution at national and regional events, and provide more publicity on Camelid Community throughout the year.

Marketing and Promotion

Development of our animals’ fiber as a real industry was seen as vital for both llama and alpaca industries, as well as for the camelid community as a whole. Creating small, higher end niche markets makes sense because we have fine exquisite fiber, and we also cannot produce the quantities of fiber necessary for large scale commercial markets.

Though we do overlap in so many ways, one area where the llama industry and alpaca industry each stands on its own is in the marketing and promotion of their animals. Alpaca representatives, in fact, cited marketing of their animals as one of their industry’s strengths, including DNA testing and the ability for owners to track animal pedigrees. But they also listed the high cost of entry into their industry as a weakness and were concerned that there is no real “unified vision of the future” for their industry. They also have suffered growing pains in the transition of the Alpaca Registry, Inc. (ARI) and the Alpaca Owners & Breeders Association (AOBA) into their own offices. ARI and AOBA each will be going through a strategic planning process and then will come together for a joint ARI/AOBA planning process.

On the other hand, llama representatives saw marketing as one of their industry’s biggest weaknesses. “Marketing to ourselves and not other groups” was listed as one of the industry’s biggest problems, and the diversity of uses for llamas and the diversity of the owners themselves has been a real impediment to marketing. Though we as an industry should be able to take advantage of the many uses of llamas to market to a variety of audiences, instead we have pulled in different directions, resulting in lack of promotion of the industry in general. The biggest negative image to overcome was felt to be spitting and the problem of llamas in petting zoos. A variety of positive steps were suggested to begin developing an overall marketing plan, and a group is starting to work in that area.

The Bigger Picture

In very candid and far reaching discussions, participants in Camelid Community 2007 felt we as a community cannot afford to ignore the bigger picture if we are to succeed. Issues like the economy at home and abroad, global warming and climate change, and biosecurity and the threat of infectious diseases on an international level are critical to our existence as an industry and community—and even to existence on our individual farms and acreages across the country. We cannot afford to ignore them.

Take Away Topics from Camelid Community 2007

Camelid Community—Provide CC press release to all 2007 attendees for use with their local media; provide final CC 2007 report to attendees, organization presidents, newsletters and other publications; provide publicity on CC throughout the year; create an information sheet on CC for use at local, regional and national camelid shows and events and for distribution to camelid organizations and newsletters; contact heads of camelid organizations to encourage their presence at CC.

IRC Council—Provide camelid organizations by late fall 2007 with educational module or template for educating and training animal control authorities regarding camelid care and handling; continue to create and distribute educational modules for other audiences such as new owners and the general public; distribute camelid welfare survey to camelid organizations by early fall 2007.

ALSA and AOBA—Have members set up Halter Donation Stations at shows and other events to collect new and used halters for use in camelid welfare and re-homing situations involving llamas and alpacas.

ARI and ILR—Provide place on registration certificates to list the location of an animal’s microchip.

Standards of Care Group—Make standards of care documents more easily accessible and easier to print so they can be more widely used.

Various 2007 CC Attendees—Create the following for camelid organizations to share with their members: model for local camelid herd health day or health fair; model for special local camelid fair or festival to help educate the general public; information sheet listing the top reasons why llama and alpaca owners need to belong to a camelid organization; information sheet listing many small ways owners can help the camelid community; list of ideas on how to reach new and prospective llama and alpaca owners who don’t belong to any camelid organizations. Contact sheep and goat associations, and offer to write articles on caring for guard llamas for use in their publications and newsletters.

Camelid Community welcomes input from any and all members of the llama and alpaca community on these and other ideas. Please feel free to contact us with your suggestions and comments (see contact information below). Your suggestions will be forwarded to the appropriate individuals or groups and will be added to the discussion list for next year’s Camelid Community.

Reports Submitted at Camelid Community 2007

Reports and documents submitted at Camelid Community 2007 are available on the web site for the International Camelid Institute (ICI) at www.icinfo.org, as is this overall summary and report. Reports include:

“Biosecurity for Camelid Owners”

“National Animal Identification System—Update August 3, 2007”

“IRC Council Report to Camelid Community 2007”

“Estate Planning for Camelids”/“Thoughts on Planning for the Care of Your Animals”

“Pack Llama Trial Association”

“The Alpaca Registry—Report to Camelid Community”

“Alpaca Owners & Breeders Association Report for Camelid Community 2007”

“The State of the ILR—August 2007”

“Alpaca & Llama Show Association Report to Camelid Community 2007”

“Lama Medical Research Group Report to Camelid Community—August 2007”

“Morris Animal Foundation—Report”

“Alpaca Research Foundation Update—Camelid Community August 3-5, 2007”

“Web Links—Camelid Community 2007 Presentations and Discussions”

Camelid Community 2008

Work already has begun on Camelid Community 2008, which is set for Aug. 1-3, 2008, at the Radisson Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri. For information on how you or your organization can be involved, contact Sheila Fugina (bsfugina@presenter.com, 715-246-5837) or Barb Baker (bebaker@hughes.net, 740-397-1736).