

SHEEPGUARDS - LLAMAS?

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Yep, llamas work. They make great guard animals, inexpensively too!

Sheep predation loss reduced by 95% by the use of carefully selected guard llamas. This is according to Dr. Bill Franklin, Iowa State University, in a 1993 study of 145 ranchers using llamas as sheep guards. On open range with just the shepherd and herding dogs predation loss was 11%, mostly lambs. Same factors but add a llama – predation loss reduced to 1%. A 95% decrease!

In the Eastern part of the United States sheep are fenced in, but fences often do not keep dogs and coyotes out. The guard animal is often the sole line of defense. We have delivered many llamas to sheep owners with fence 36" or less high. Predators just step in for dinner. Multiple lines of defense are a necessity. **Good management, good fences and good guards are partners.**

How does a llama guard? By **intimidation**, by going toward perceived danger. When a llama sees something unusual, he checks it out. He approaches danger, staying between it and his herd. This persuades dogs or coyotes to go next door for dinner. If they enter his space, usually a fence line, he attacks using his front feet to stomp. A guard llama killed a chow/malamute cross last summer in Vermont. When the dog was found he was partially in, under a gate. The llama got him right there, before he entered. It is unusual for them to have to attack. **Intimidation!** Some llamas actually herd their charges away from danger.

Llama guards are selected by age two when they are gelded. In choosing a llama guard, the breeder should look carefully at the prospects' personality. He must be among the most alert and watchful in the herd. He must bond well within their herd. He must be in excellent health. He must have a desire to remain aloof. This is not the llama that you want as a pet. There is such a thing as a "berserk llama," a hand-raised llama that has lost the defining line between people and llamas. This animal is dangerous, and must not be used as a guard. Otherwise, your guard llama will be fine with you and your grandchildren. Your pet dogs should not be allowed in the pastures. Llamas will learn to differentiate between predators and your working, herding, dogs. Careful introduction is the rule.

A guard, a work animal, is the only time when responsible breeders will sell a single llama. It is probable that you should not have two llamas guarding the same herd, due to the risk of their bonding and not guarding. This has been proved wrong on occasion, but is the general practice. Extreme care must be taken by the breeder in selecting llamas to be sold as guards. We find that about 10% of our gelded males are prospects, and only half of those end up as guards. **Not a llama you buy at auction!** Buy from a professional. They have the same feed and veterinary regimen as sheep, goats and cattle, reducing expenses.

Guaranteed guard llamas sell for around \$1,000, and will normally be effective for ten to 15 years, for a cost of under \$100 per year. This is significantly less than a guard dog, for example, which costs around \$700 and is effective for three to four years. All guards are inexpensive compared to predation loss. Do not buy a guard llama at an auction any more than you would get a guard dog from a pound. You need a professional to back your purchase, answer your questions, and if necessary, exchange the animal. **Your good management is the first line of defense.**

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