

Shuda – wuda – cuda. Didn't. Sorry!

Lars Garrison, West Mountain Farm, Stamford VT ©

We have been through the process. We know that we should have done something important. We ignored our instincts and desires. Suddenly (it seemed) there was no longer a good way to accomplish what we had in mind. Procrastinators, unite!

After the recent debacle in Florida, we have now all written our living wills, signed a durable power of attorney, chosen a health care proxy, thought out what we want to happen to us in the event of our incapacity, informed everybody. What thought have you given to the care of your animals under these same conditions?

We must not, **we cannot**, overlook our friends that have given us so much. The time is past to think about selling. That plan had to begin ten years ago. Now we may not even have time to establish standards of care when we give our friends away. If you haven't made arrangements regarding care before, whoever is liquidating your worldly goods may have little knowledge of your wishes and/or standards. Without a pre-financed plan, standards of care may be ignored at the peril of your animals. Your fault!

The many standards can be condensed into four:

1. Start ten years ago. Formulate your plan. Tell everybody what it is.
2. Forget money. Placement of your animals is more likely to cost money than make it.
3. Recognize that it may be necessary to compromise your care standards somewhat.
4. Refresh your plan annually.

We are currently the owners of 50 llamas and alpacas, down from a high of around 150. The reduction is a part of the plan begun several years ago. We have carefully maintained our studs, ten of them, although they will soon draw Social Security. Many of our females are fairly old. The average age of our herd is nearing ten years. We reduced breeding four years ago. We will have no more crias, four last year, one the year before. With normal sales and attrition, we will end 2005 with around 30. At that point, we will have few saleable animals. The goal is to have five animals at years end.

What does one do with 30 loved animals of a certain age? They are well cared for, they are in excellent condition, they are up to date on all health issues, they are accustomed to being handled and babied a bit during the winter. The ladies probably have one or two more crias in them; the studs can produce for several years. The outstanding bloodlines are many and varied with no genetic problems of any kind. Difficult but true: they have no commercial value.

Add in our personal situation. We are in our 70's, in reasonable health, living at the end of the dirt road with our lamas, enjoying life thoroughly, well reputed in the lama world – privileged! We recognize that health issues may arise at any time; we must be prepared. Practically, we must reduce our herd to five non-breeding animals this year. If we don't make it, next year will do (we hope).

The thrust of our plan:

1. Sell all of the viable and desirable animals into good homes as the market permits. This generally results in the sale of 25% of the herd each year.
2. Look widely and aggressively for opportunities to give animals of age away: schools, nursing homes, people with llamas that would take more, all likely clients.
3. Compromise standards somewhat on end of life care, letting some go without extreme care. This may be better than the alternative.
4. Make preliminary judgments regarding (so-called) rescue operations that might take in our remaining animals *if we send them with an appropriate endowment*.
5. Search diligently for opportunities that may need our animals to forward their interests – sheep and goat owners for example. Check these out carefully to be sure that at least minimal standards of care will be observed.
6. *Do not allow money to be an issue!* You don't need it now anyway.
7. Make preliminary written arrangements with potential recipients.
8. Write it down, notify everyone that may be involved, put a copy with your will.

Now you may live a long and worry-free life knowing that your animals will be well cared for. Incidentally, call me if you are willing to take in a few of our old girls... 802 694 1417.