

Well-planned barns and pastures, and innovative use of high- and low-tech gadgets can make life on the farm much easier. If you have any helpful "husbandry hints," *Alpacas Magazine* would like to hear from you.



Bill & Sherri Duey

Husbandry Hints

Chutes for Alpacas

Alpaca ranchers can usually handle their alpacas and perform routine husbandry and healthcare procedures by using only a halter. Sometimes an assistant is needed to hold an alpaca for more difficult procedures. And for those most difficult healthcare procedures, a well-designed alpaca chute can be a great tool to limit the alpaca's ability to move freely.

An alpaca chute is best described as a short, narrow stall, just slightly larger than an alpaca. It should include a head gate, specifically designed for alpacas. It should also include features to protect the alpaca from injury and provide access to all parts of the alpaca for healthcare procedures.

Sometimes you need a containment area for simply holding your alpaca in very close confinement, without restraints. A chute can serve this purpose by limiting the alpaca's movement. In these cases, a simple rectangular-shaped open top, "box" stall with four solid sides will serve the purpose. It should be designed to be large enough to allow your alpaca to stand comfortably, yet not be able to turn around or go forward or backward. The chute is typically about 22 to 28 inches (=56 cm x 71 cm) wide, by 50 to 55 inches (1.27 m x 1.4 m) long, by five feet high with an open top. A head gate may not be needed and the procedure, exam, etc. can take place simply by limiting the ability of the alpaca to move. This level of confinement works well for injections, taking temperatures, checking udders, etc.

More difficult procedures such as teeth trimming, fighting teeth removal, reproductive exams, eye treatments,



An alpaca chute should have a rubber surfaced floor covering; side and rear panels that open or partially open; and a head gate designed for alpacas.

etc., where you or your veterinarian needs the alpaca's head and neck fully restrained in order to safely perform the procedure may require the use of a head gate. **Note:** do not use a head gate without the use of a belly band. If the alpaca tries to push while in the head gate, it will place undue strain on the alpaca's neck.

The head gate should be properly designed and constructed of good quality materials. It should have two vertical bars hinged and adjustable for width at the base. The bars should be padded and have a secure, adjustable top locking mechanism that can be quickly released in case of emergency.

The chute should have very strong horizontal top rails to suspend a belly band. A belly band is a strong, wide sling which is placed under a standing alpaca's belly and then firmly secured to the top rails. If the alpaca attempts to push, it will be suspended by the belly band. It is very important to insure that the rope holding



A head gate should be designed to be adjusted easily and quickly. Alpaca necks vary greatly in thickness. Even the same alpaca's neck varies from full-fleeced to shorn condition. This head gate can be adjusted easily by one person.

up the belly band can be quickly released with a panic snap should a problem occur. (**Note:** do not use chains to support belly bands as they are very difficult to release under tension from the weight of the alpaca.)

Alpaca restraint chutes can be purchased pre-made, ready to be placed in service. Or, you may want to custom design a chute, incorporate the features that you need, and build it on site. A chute can be a permanent installation or a portable unit. You need to decide which system works best for your particular situation.

Alpaca chutes should have the following features:

- Narrow width (22" to 28") (Size compatible with platform scale)
- Solid side panels – we recommend solid side panels as opposed to pipe-gate type sides that have pipes or bars with wide openings. Alpaca legs can find their way into amazing locations and positions as the animal is being prepared for



A rear access door is very important to you and your vet for healthcare procedures in this zone.

- restraint. The smooth solid side panels do not allow legs to become entangled and cause injury.
- c. Hinged side panels to allow access to alpaca while in the chute
- d. Rear door panel to allow access to chute for procedures
- e. Adjustable rear barrier to prevent backing up and reduce strain on halter
- f. Front removable panel to place in front of head gate when not in use
- g. Smooth edges and padded corners
- h. Rubber floor mat
- i. Well-lighted chute area
- j. Open space around chute for access
- k. Electrical outlet near chute for tooth grinders, platform scales, etc.
- l. Padded head gate bars



An alpaca belly sling should always be used with a head gate. If the alpaca tries to push, the sling will prevent the animal from going down. It will also prevent stress on the neck and head. Strong overhead support beams are needed to use a belly sling.



A well fitting and properly adjusted halter is critical for cross-tying. Cross-tie straps are snapped to the lower ring of the halter. Insure that the alpaca's shoulders are up against the padded head gate bars.

- m. Adjustable head gate – necks vary, especially full-fleeced vs. sheared
- n. Strong, perfectly fitting halter
- o. Solid posts in front of the head gate with rings for securing halter crossties
- p. Cross tie restraint straps with panic release snaps
- q. Strong horizontal overhead bars for securing belly sling
- r. Belly sling, ropes, and panic release snap
- s. Follow manufacturers instructions for portable chutes to prevent tipping

While your alpaca is in a chute, try to help the alpaca relax as much as is possible by speaking soothingly and massaging the alpaca's favorite stress-release point. Another good technique is to insure that the alpaca can see another alpaca friend, even while it is in the head gate. This is especially true of dams with a cria. The dam will usually remain much calmer if she can see and knows where the little tyke is. This will help insure that the alpaca does not



This is an alpaca's view of the inside of a containment chute when not using a head gate. Many times a containment chute works great for confining the alpaca to very limited mobility, yet not restraining it.



Panic snaps are a must for using a cross-tie in a head gate. The alpaca is held securely in place, but if a problem develops, you can slide the arrow portion of the snap forward with two fingers and the snap instantly releases, even if under strain.

get overly stressed out from the experience. Once the alpaca is ready to be released, carefully release the alpaca and calmly return it to the herd.

Remember, use the least amount of confinement necessary. Use a head gate, cross tie, and belly band if restraint is determined to be needed to do the job. A well-designed alpaca chute is an important tool on an alpaca ranch that can help you and your veterinarian safely care for your alpacas.

Bill and Sherri Duey operate Southern Iowa Alpacas, located in the hills 60 miles southeast of Des Moines. They have incorporated innovative features into their alpaca ranch and conduct seminars on business planning, animal selection and ranch setup. You may view their website at www.southerniowaalpacas.com or contact them directly at alpacas@southerniowaalpacas.com.



Be sure a platform scale designed for alpacas or llamas will adequately fit in the chute. A chute works great doubling as an area to confine the alpacas on a portable platform scale.