

WORKING WITH YOUR VET

by Bill and Sherri Duey

Have a sick alpaca? Who are you going to call? Your alpaca veterinarian, of course, but just like your personal doctor, your vet needs to thoroughly know your alpaca herd before you call him or her out for assistance.

There are probably several good vets in your area, but few vets have experience in working with camelids. If you are fortunate enough to have an experienced alpaca vet in your neighborhood, by all means, work with him. But if you don't, you will need to select a vet and develop a good working relationship. You can learn more about alpacas together.

Try several vets to see which one works best with your alpacas AND you. It is important to select a vet who is willing to learn more about alpacas and is not hesitant to direct you to a specialist for more difficult cases.

Our vet had little knowledge of camelids prior to handling our herd. His business is large farm animals such as cattle, horses, and sheep. But he was willing to work with us and to learn more about caring for alpacas. He is very much aware of their value and responds quickly to emergency and neonatal calls. Normally, he handles our alpacas first thing in the day prior to handling other animals. If doing a ranch call at the end of the day, he often showers and

changes clothes first to prevent carrying diseases to our ranch. Our vet is very thorough and not hesitant to call alpaca vets for consultation when needed.

Things to work out with your vet early on include: What does your vet expect from you? Does he want you to handle all routine herd care and only call him for assistance on non-routine procedures? Or does he want to be part of the monthly animal wellness checks, shot regimes, etc.? What do you expect from your vet? Do you want to handle as much of the herd care as possible, or do you want assistance for routine activities?

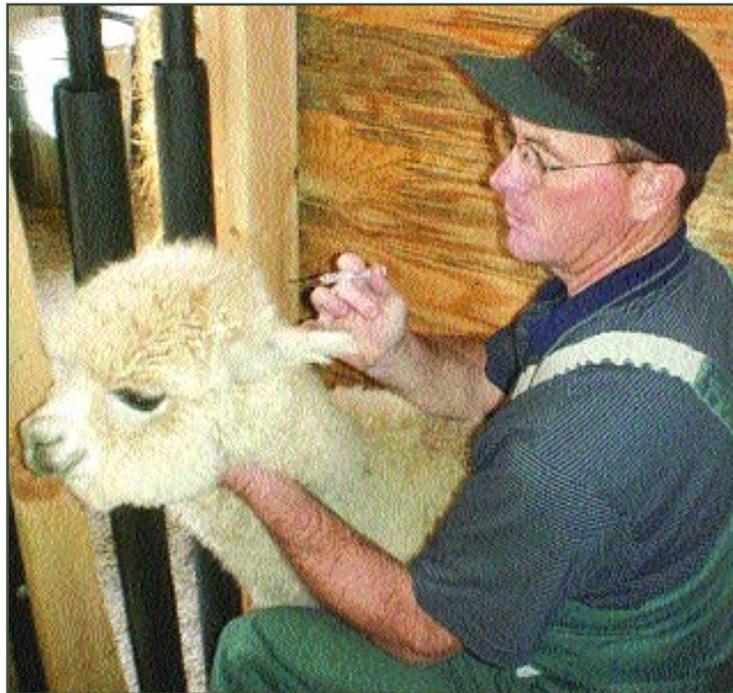
Fee schedules are important to understand up front as well. What is the charge for a trip to your ranch? What

are the fees for services such as injections, blood sampling, installing micro chips, tooth extraction, plasma transfusions, newborn cria exams, transportation certificate exams, ultrasounds, IgG tests, progesterone tests, registration DNA blood draws, etc.? Are after hours and emergency calls extra charges?

Another important area to discuss is the protocol for emergency transfers. It is a good idea to have a university veterinary surgical hospital selected before the need arises. The hospital phone number should be recorded with both you and your vet. Travel route maps should be in your vehicle at all times. If a transfer is needed, your vet will make the arrangements with the hospital and be the referring veterinarian. In an emergency, you will have plenty of other things to worry about and be glad you have previously made these arrangements.

Vaccination protocols are important to discuss with your vet. Work with your vet to establish an annual vaccination schedule for each of your alpacas. The schedule should take into consideration gender, age, and condition of pregnancy. Write all of the dates down on a calendar and follow it religiously. Use only the products and dosages that your vet has approved.

It is helpful to have an area for you or your vet to work in that includes a



Dr. Greg Mobley, DVM, of Albia, Iowa, prepares to implant a microchip in the base of the left ear of a 6 month old cria.

table, equipment storage, and a water supply. Special alpaca restraining equipment such as halters and leads, restraint chutes, and Australian stretching ropes may prove invaluable when a serious medical problem occurs.

Plan ahead and discuss what other items your vet anticipates needing on your ranch such as plasma and transfusion kits.

It may be helpful to buy two sets of alpaca vet books and give one set to your vet. This will allow you to more effectively communicate with your vet. This gesture will also indicate you are serious about a long-term commitment to having him care for your herd.

A well-stocked and organized vet kit is a must. A large plastic toolbox works well to store the needed vet supplies and equipment.

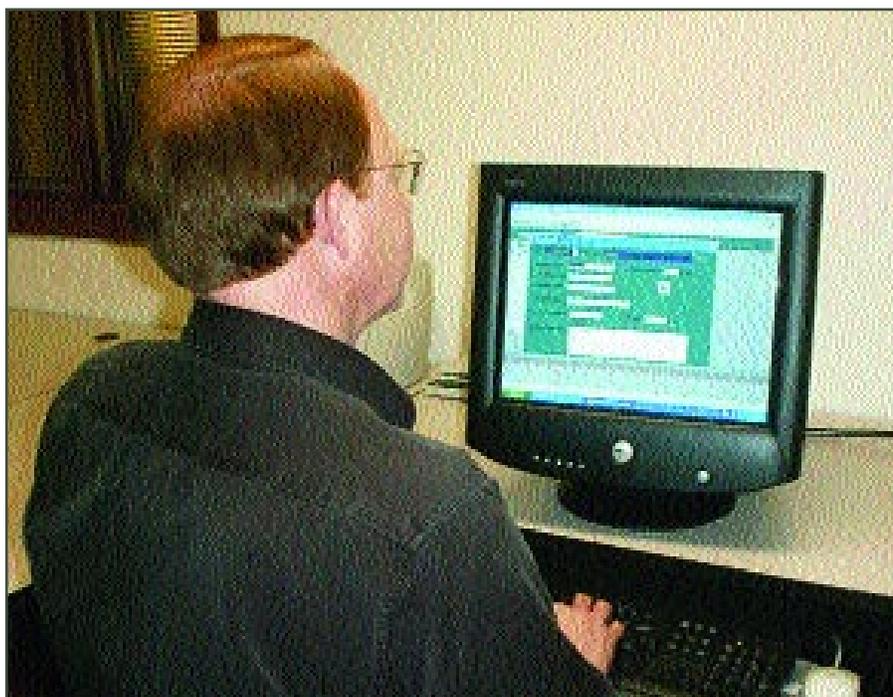
Alpaca health record keeping is a very important part of your ranching operation. Whether you keep vet records with a pen and paper or on a



computer, your information should include: registration data, weight entries, medicines, dosage rates, breeding history, notes, etc. for each alpaca. Alpaca record-keeping software programs are available that are user friendly and very helpful. Print-outs of these records can be kept in a notebook and used in the barn while you are working with your alpacas. Good records are critical in working with your vet since both of you will be sharing in the care of your herd.

A list of suggested items to include in the vet kit:

- Exam gloves
- Note pads and pencils
- Antiseptic ointment
- Antibiotic ointment
- Thermometer and covers
- Dremel tool, medium grinding wheel
- Vet wrap
- Nurse's tape
- Toe nail trimmers
- Epinephrine
- Blood stop powder
- Bandage scissors
- Syringes, various dosage sizes
- Syringe needles, various sizes
- Stethoscope
- Gauze pads



Keeping detailed vet records on your alpacas is important for maintaining your alpaca herd's health. A good software program can save you time and provide organization to your record keeping system.

Bill and Sherri Duey operate Southern Iowa Alpacas, located 60 miles southeast of Des Moines. They have incorporated a number of innovative features in their alpaca ranch and are happy to share their experience in new ranch setup with alpaca owners. You may view their website at www.southerniowaalpacas.com or contact them directly at alpacas@southerniowaalpacas.com.