

# **NEAOBA 101 Secrets & Helpful Hints of New England Alpaca Farmers**

## **How to use a panel as a creep feeder**

Another idea that I have used (but did not "invent") is to create a cria creep entrance by turning a green panel on end and fastening it between two regular panels. I chose to use a shorter panel (meant to fit with a gate), and placing it next to the gate, it is the same height as the overhead gate piece. Turning the panel on its side creates several narrow vertical openings that crias can slip through, but mamas cannot. My little guys and girls love to go in and out. And I didn't have to buy anything new!

*Marcia Humphrey*

*Fancy Fleece Alpacas*

## **How to work with your animals**

We have found that training alpacas can be different for each one as their temperament and personalities can all be different. But we do try to begin the training of each alpaca in the same way. The alpaca needs to know that every time you come to it, the reason is not that something is going to be done to the animal (i.e., vet, vaccines, haltering). They do learn commands and associations. We start slowly with an alpaca in a small area and tell the animal to "stand". When it is at a point of standing still, we praise it and stop when it moves. We will also touch the alpaca when he is standing and say "touch". Again praise is used when the alpaca stands while we are touching it. We have found that an alpaca that is aware of what is going to happen is much less skittish than one who is taken by surprise. In short time they learn what "stand" and "touch" mean and this makes it much easier to handle them. It can be a slow process, taking just a minute or so in the beginning. But once they see that after you have touched them and handled them and you walk away without doing anything "bad" to them, they don't worry so much the next time you come towards them. Trust is very important and makes everything much easier. By training alpacas in this way, we have been able to handle vet check ups without the need to halter anyone and not having to run around pens trying to "catch" them.

*Debra & Glenn Johnson*

*Chee Chee Mamook Farm*

## **How to assist mom in weaning baby**

One tip we have for small alpaca breeders that don't have the space to separate moms from their weanlings. Sometimes a weanling will insist on nursing or is so persistent that the Mom allows it to nurse. We have also a Mom who absorbed the fetus and encouraged its previous cria to begin nursing again, especially when all the other moms in the paddock were have new babies. If the farm can't separate them because of lack of space, we have been successful at deterring the nursing by applying Bag Bam to teats of Mom. You don't need very much, just a swipe, baby hates it. You only need to apply every other day, but you must be diligent at this for a week or more, baby will continue to check. The position of the teat on Mom is tucked up enough that the Bag Bam doesn't make any mess. Like I said before, only a little dab will do.

*Doris Randall,*

*Randall Stick Park*

## **How to keep records and info in barn.**

We hang a large chalkboard along with a supply of colored chalk in our barn. We don't use wipe off boards due to the problem with the markers freezing in New England winters.

We record the date we last gave parasite injections, due dates of our dams (breeding and spit off dates prior) names, dates and weights of cria when last weighed, date and time of a scheduled vet visit and anything else pertinent we need to keep track of at a glance. Different color chalk can be used for color-coding priority and/or items listed.

*Patricia Houde*

*Lisa Houde*

*Alpaca Fields, Inc.*

## **How to Introduce Alpacas to Catch Pens while Simply doing Chores**

Catch pens are simply small/medium containment areas that aid in working with alpacas. We have found that presenting this area as a safe, pleasurable space is paramount to your animals accepting a catch pen with ease. So, what could be more pleasurable than eating? Our catch pens double as feeding areas twice daily. This area is closed until I open the gate and they are allowed in to eat their grain. Our animals are generally eager to enter because the space is connected with a positive experience.

So when the days arrive when we have to administer shots, vet exams, or toe nail trimmings the animals are already desensitized to the catch pen and enter with ease or they are already in there because they were recently fed.

This use of catch pens also lends itself well to fulfilling the individual feeding needs of a mixed herd—lactating females, crias, chow-hounds, slow eaters etc. The alpacas will quickly learn where they go to get fed without direction! At our farm we have been able to do this successfully with up to 40 animals.

*Dawn & John Brooker*

*Fiber Fields Alpaca Farm*

## **How to avoid dehydration in winter.**

Both of my shelters have water in heated buckets so the alpacas have water in even the coldest temps.

Although this water is above freezing, it's still pretty cold. I've found that my alpacas really enjoy a warm water treat in the winter. When the temps are really frigid, I also

provide several buckets of warm water for them. I have a number of 12-quart galvanized pails, and I just fill a couple in the house from the hot water tap, both morning and night. Just turn on the hot water tap full force, no need to cool it down with any cold water. By the time I've walked out to the barn with the pails, they have cooled somewhat anyway. Not all of the alpacas took to the warm water right away, but given time to discover it, they all seem to enjoy it now.

It's the alpaca equivalent of hot soup on a cold winter's day!

*Pamela Drew*

*Pamelamas llc*

## **How to administer meds to alpacas orally.**

*This next one may border on veterinary advice, but I'm going to submit it anyway as I feel it's only advice on how to get meds into an alpaca by mouth, not what kind or how much to give.*

\*\*\*\*\*

I have had zero luck getting my alpacas to take any powdered or liquid meds mixed into their feed. I have found two simple pieces of equipment to be invaluable for getting either liquid or powder meds into alpacas by mouth. 1) A dosing syringe with extender for liquids and 2) a plastic syringe (with the needle removed) for tablets or capsules. The dosing syringe is available from most alpaca suppliers, and comes in various sizes (I have the 20 cc size). Be sure to get the extender with it. Draw the liquid up into the syringe, hold the alpaca's head in one hand and insert the extender into side of mouth with other hand, and inject liquid into mouth. A plastic syringe (with needle removed) with a bit of an adjustment can also be used for giving tablets or capsules.

Tablets can be crushed into a powder and mixed with applesauce or yogurt, and capsules can be opened and also mixed with applesauce or yogurt. Here's the adjustment - cut off the end of the syringe, so that the entire end of the syringe is open. Fill the syringe with the applesauce or yogurt mixture, and administer into the side of the alpacas mouth. It takes a bit of practice, and some animals are more cooperative than others, but it gets the needed meds into the animal, rather than leaving them at the bottom of the feed bowl.

*Pamela Drew*

*Pamelamas llc*

## **How to get Predator/Coyote Control for \$29 – Without A Guard Dog or a Llama**

We use a clock radio on a timer tuned to “talk radio” all night to scare coyotes away from our alpaca herd. Although we live close to the village, it still is Maine and out back there is a lot of cover for coyotes. A few summers ago we started to hear the coyotes howling almost every night. We got very concerned about how close they were getting. We asked a game warden that we knew, for suggestions...he said, “try a

radio.” We went straight to Radio Shack and purchased a clock radio for \$29.00. We put in inside an old plastic cooler tipped on its side on the ground. The vibrations went to the ground and echoed inside the cooler. It wasn’t loud...the sound of a normal human voice. But coyotes have very acute hearing. The problem is, that the only talk radio all night long is Rauch Limbaugh...so all of our alpacas turned out pro-Bush. Good news is we haven’t heard the coyotes howling since we started with the radio.

*Terence Callery*

*Village Farm Alpacas*

## **How to be customer focused when you missed the customer**

All of us have to leave the farm, and sometimes a customer will show up unannounced, you hate to miss them, but you want them to come back. I always leave a small amount of sealed packets they can take with them, just brief information about the farm and how they may reach you in the future. I found more people appreciate this extra effort in keeping communication lines open and they call back later.

*Doris Randall*

*Randall Stick Park*

## **How to use a Poly Dome Calf Nurseries for Alpacas**

One year we were in a dilemma as to how to wean our crias for the spring shows when we only had one barn for the females and their crias. The perfect solution was using a Poly Dome Calf Nursery. They are 60” high by 86” in diameter, rugged, warm and dry in storms, well ventilated, and can stack on top of each other, so we ordered two. They arrived on a flatbed, and we easily rolled them up the driveway, through a four-foot gate, and into the pastures. We put hay in the feeder that comes with the dome and placed it near the back. Within minutes moms and crias were stepping over the door’s threshold to eat the hay. The next step was fencing the dome into a rectangle using the existing fence and green panels. We used a roll of plastic one inch square green fencing from Home Depot and attached it with cable ties to the green panels so crias wouldn’t crawl or nurse through the panels. The crias were protected from March cold, snow and rain in their cozy dome filled with straw and plentiful hay while having their moms nearby for security. After the weaning period, we found three or four alpacas at a time hanging out inside napping and eating. We now have three domes and use them year round for hay stations and mobile living quarters. Place them in the sun for winter and under a shady tree in summer with the door facing south. For the money, you could not build a shelter with the same flexibility.

*Sea Hill Farm*

## **How to make your barn more inviting to both man and beast!**

Our favorite feature of our barn, without a doubt, is the **cathedral ceiling** over the alpacas, made of **opaque corrugated roofing**. This feature floods our barn with light at all times, even on the darkest days! And when there is a moon, it’s even lit up at night! We’ve read that often alpacas don’t like to spend time in the barn because it makes them feel closed in and confined. The high ceiling and brightness created from this design makes their space feel open, airy and non-confining. Our animals seem to love being in our barn! Other benefits to the alpacas include: additional exposure to sunlight giving them much needed vitamin D and warmth in the winter, the natural antibacterial properties of the sun help keep bacteria, germs and mold down and the added ventilation/circulation that comes with the high and open ceiling keeps them healthier and cooler in the summer. There are benefits to the humans on our farm as well. Additional lighting makes it easier to see when doing husbandry and clean-up, it’s easier to see your animals from the house or other areas of the farm, because the barn is always illuminated as if there were a light on at all times, it’s as if there is always a night light on too, making it easier to find the light switch when you have to go out to the barn at night, it’s an inexpensive roofing material and it’s good for your soul to work and spend time in a place that is bright, sunny and cheerful! Some of you may be thinking that an opaque corrugated roof is not the most attractive thing to look at, especially if it’s only in half of the roof (we chose not to put it over the hay loft end because of the potential of added heat and drying from the sun). We agree! This feature is on the backside of our barn where no one can see it. From the front, it looks like a classic colonial style barn. You’d never know it was there!

*Wendy Eaton*

*Colonial Thyme Alpacas*

## **How to milk an Alpaca**

Sometimes you need to milk an alpaca. Maybe a cria is a little slow getting started, or maybe a dam is engorged and you just want to relieve the pressure for her. I am not a good alpaca milker. You need a syringe that fits the alpaca. We needed to strip milk off a girl with huge, engorged teats so we used a 60cc syringe, but sometimes a 20 or even a 10 might work. You're going to fit the tube over the whole teat and hold it against the udder to create suction.

First remove the plunger and cut off the needle end of the syringe so it is one consistent diameter its whole length. Now re-insert the plunger from the cut end. This way the smooth uncut end of the tube will rest against the alpaca. Ready?

Place the syringe over the teat and hold it against the skin of the udder. Now pull the plunger part way out. It should suck the teat down a little into the syringe. Wetting the end of the tube or using a little lubricant may enhance the seal. Give Mom a minute to let milk down. Now you can pull the plunger out a little more. When the milk starts, it will stream into the syringe. Empty the syringe and start again. You can even pump the plunger a little while it's on the teat and increase the flow.

If Mom is sore, I don't imagine this feels great, but at least you're not pinching or pulling the teats. Our girl, who is not an easy animal to manage (200 lbs. plus), began to relax and stop screaming as her pressure was relieved. And it's much easier to save the milk if you want it. Definitely worth trying.

*Liz & John MacEachran  
Kilblaan Farm*

## **How to eliminate gnats, tics and other pesky bugs from bothering the herd.**

We had a bad problem one year with tics burrowing into the fleece of some of our boys in the far field, coming from the high grass areas. Even after mowing, the tics kept coming. We tried an alpaca friendly bug repellent, and they just laughed at it. After speaking with some local cattle farmers, they suggested some ducks, particularly the Muscovy breed (some say these may be mean). We started with two females and a male, and after a few hatchings, we had about ten. They scoured the pasture's high grass and dung piles, and within a couple weeks, not only were the tics gone, but also the gnats, flies, even mosquitoes! For the first summer in years, we could come out on a beautiful summer night without a suit of armor to protect us!

*Shane and Kimberly May  
Stick House Farm Alpacas*

## **How to help prevent Choke**

Do your animals have trouble with choke? Are you concerned with choke? Here's what helped our choking animals...We use plastic feed bins for our animals and place them 3-4 ft apart, making sure there is a bin for each animal. We can still do this as we have a big barn and a small farm! The real secret is this...in each bin I place 2 or 3 baseball size rocks. The grain falls in the bins around the rocks. This way the animal cannot gulp the grain, but has to push the rocks around with its nose. This slows them down and has reduced our concerns for choking to near zero. We do clean the rocks, especially in the summer, by placing them in a bucket of water and soaking them for a while until they are clean. This idea works great!!

*Janice A Thompson  
Darron Spalty  
New Millennium Alpaca Farm*

## **How to lighten your load**

I have a tool on my farm that I find I cannot live without in the winter. It's inexpensive, durable and easy to clean. It's a Childs plastic sled. In fact, I have two that I use. One I keep for moving "clean" things, like bales of hay and bags of grain. The other is my "poop sled". I use them to move things between vehicles and barns and between our 3 barns. I find it's much easier in the winter than trying to carry things separately or trying to use a wheel barrel.

*Janice A Thompson  
Darron Spalty  
New Millennium Alpaca Farm*

## **How to cut the cost of cria coats**

I find buying cria coats in all the various sizes to become very expensive so I go to consignment shops and purchase as many zip up fleece vests as I can find. I buy sizes from toddlers to about size 6 or so, in a great variety of colors.

They cost \$2 to \$3 a piece and they are machine washable and dryable. I put the cria's front legs in the armholes and zip the vest up the cria's back. They don't slip off and they provide great coverage for the cria's internal organs and also some neck protection. Give one a try. I find them much better than the professionally manufactured cria coat, and you can buy about 10 fleece vests for the price of 1 cria coat.

*Susan Evon  
Sleeping Monk Farm*

## **How to keep manure sweet and neat**

Alpacas are hardwired to go in one communal dung pile-- which makes scooping up after them really easy. It is a genetic adaptation that helps to reduce parasites in the herd, as well as making for more available grazing. One large pile will compost and heat up, killing parasites - leaving the rest of the field free of waste.

Regardless of how hard you try, your alpacas will sooner or later start a dung pile inside the barn or shelter when the rain or snow keeps them from venturing out to the designated spot. We didn't realize it when we built our small barn with a breezeway attached to the side, that this would be the perfect place for their "indoor latrine". When our alpacas started pooping inside the barn during a snowstorm, we moved the pile just outside under the cover of the breezeway.

We use a large-wheeled big rubberized cart, which we got at Home Depot, that can hold about three times what a wheel barrel could for the daily dung removal chores. We have a compost pile located outside the fence, slightly down hill from the barn. We try to pile up each cartload, flipping it up and on top of the pile, so it naturally composes down. We sometimes use a pair of boards as a ramp for the cart, which helps to get it up on top of the compost heap. The composted manure that is a year old...is used to fertilize a pasture that is also seeded and then rotated out of use for four weeks.

Having the poop pile in the breezeway keeps the odor down in the barn. We also dress the area with a mixture of three parts lime to one part "Sweet PDZ" which is a horse stall freshener. That works great on the odor, which comes more from the urine than the dung. We get sawdust from the sawmill down the road (\$15 for a truck load of full contractor bags) and we broadcast a shovel full after the daily clean up. We keep the sawdust in plastic garbage buckets. During the winter, dung piles freeze to the ground, however the combination of the sawdust and the covered area of the breezeway help to keep the dung from freezing into the ground.

Incidentally...I have the biggest and best garlic beds in Maine! The composted alpaca manure also gets used up in them as well as my vegetable gardens.

*Terry and Bonnie Callery  
Village Farm Alpacas*

## **How To keep poop out of the barn?**

Create an alpaca poop box. Yup, a box – and it's very simple to make. Simply screw together four 1x6 boards or whatever size you have handy and place the box just outside the barn, preferable under an overhang (but not necessary) to protect the alpacas from the weather. We have a small box outside every doorway and bigger boxes in the paddocks by the barn for "social gatherings" - we've seen six of our girls in a box at one time! The boxes do a great job showing the alpacas boundaries. While some poop may spill over, it is never far from the box and because the box is not far from the barn, it's easy to use.

But do they really work? Join us, you'll see...

**Secret ingredients:** Don't forget to put in some fresh poop to get them started. You can also line the boxes with indoor/outdoor carpeting (as appropriate). The liquids will drain through leaving the poops on top for easy removal without digging out excess ground covering.

*Now for the real secret:* Shhhh - don't tell our alpacas that their "private photos" are on the Internet.  
*Clark Summit Alpacas, LLC*  
*James Lewis, Owner/Manager*

### **How to keep animals in the right places**

If you have alpacas defecating near gates or places in the barn you do not want them to go in, take a solution of garlic and water and lightly spray the area down once a day for a week. The alpacas hate the scent and will stay clear of the area. You don't need a heavy scent, light will do the job, but you still should smell the garlic in the air. This also works well on getting mice to move out of barns or any other creature that you want to move out.

*Doris Randall*  
*Randall Stick Park*

### **How to keep them eating in cold weather**

Sometimes alpacas go off their feed in the severe cold, just when they really need those extra calories. I have gotten shredded beet pulp from the feed store and mix it w/very hot tap water. I put that in their dishes w/ their regular food on top of it. By the time the pulp has moistened, the water has cooled from very hot to warm and they have some nice warm food going into their tummies. Seems to help stimulate their appetite.

*Catherine Conner*  
*Ibiwisi Alpacas*

### **How to wrap the tail-simplified**

Instead of wrapping the dam's tail with vet wrap prior to breeding; just slip a knee high over it. The tail fibers are contained and out of the way, it's easier than taping, and once the breeding is finished-just pull off the knee high!

*Catherine Conner*  
*Ibiwisi Alpacas*