

Understanding Breed Standards

- Definitions, Usage, Advantages, Disadvantages, Modification and Industry Control

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What is a Breed?

The classic definition of a "breed" is "Animals that, through selection and breeding, have come to resemble one another and pass those traits uniformly to their offspring."

Breeds of Livestock, Oklahoma State University

What is a Standard?

- An abstract aesthetic ideal
- Not describing a particular living animal
- Never completely attained in one animal
- An inspiration
- Where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, but each part enhances the whole, with harmony, balance and consistency among the parts and neither exaggerated, distorted nor contradictory.
- A standard is a yardstick by which the breeder may measure his advances toward a perfect alpaca and by which a judge may compare animals developed according to these guidelines.
- A standard is an objective and artistic guide to a judge's good taste and educated sense of proportion, in which judging is an art and an interpretation.
- A standard should be precise enough for a judge to evaluate alpacas accurately, but flexible enough to leave room for differences in interpretation.

Why develop a breed standard?

Development of a "breed" standard identifies commonly held ideals and goals, with shared and understood terminology, and broad industry support and participation.

Breeders have a blueprint for genetic improvement according to industry held "ideals".

The industry has a well thought out system for evaluating alpacas with emphasis on economically desirable qualities.

With fiber as our end-product, con-

sensus is reached on ideals for fiber production that lead to greater economic value. Improvement in reaching the ideals should result in "success," both economically for the breeder and for the health and well being of the alpaca.

As breeders follow the standard with regard to their own breeding decisions and selections, the entire breed improves and the average moves closer to the ideal.

Consistent and objective criteria are used to evaluate alpacas for show ring, auction, and farm.

A process to modify the standard is defined, achieving stability through steady and slow evolution of the standard.

Points to Consider:

Standards should be stable - "they should not be changed at the whim of current breeders. They should stand the test of time." They should be changed only with great deliberation of stakeholders.

Quoting David Ames - "Breed standards cannot be successfully dictated by a committee, board or by a small group of individuals.

How is a Standard used?

By Breeders -

- As a blueprint for breeders to strive or aspire to and for judges to interpret attainment.
- "A roadmap for genetic improvement." (Ames)
- Breed Standard = Show Standard. They cannot contradict each other and will be ineffective if conflicting goals are identified.
- Genetic progress in alpacas is slow and so changes in breed standards should be deliberate and slow.

By Judges -

- A judge carefully analyzes each alpaca in the class, then compares each alpaca to another, and finally compares each animal to the breed standard. "A good judge will know what he/she is judging, know what is "ideal," will recog-

nize desirable and undesirable characteristics of the breed, form a mental image of the class and rank individuals by comparison, avoid bias or prejudice and then orally defend his/her placing." (Craddock)

- Judges do this now in halter classes without a written standard, comparing each alpaca to the "ideal" as determined by the judge, taking into consideration the criteria for halter judging as written in the show handbook, and the judge's training and experience.

- A detailed standard with emphasis to the ranking or importance of each feature (a point system) is used in evaluating cats/dogs/some livestock. The shorter gestation of these species can respond quickly to desired changes in phenotype.

Will Judging be better?

Probably not - judging is an interpretation, even with a detailed standard. May appear to be better because exhibitor is better educated, understands shared terminology, or has realistic expectations.

Will Judging be different?

That depends on the standard...

- Yes - if the same emphasis used to judge fleece off the animal is applied to judging fleece on the animal?
- Yes - If a point system is developed - using a score card

Why not have a standard?

Without a governing process in place the standard may be manipulated or changed too quickly resulting in disruption to the industry.

Changes may be made with insufficient research, deliberation and debate.

Ideals may be defined too narrowly, forcing over-selection of limited genetics thought to achieve such goals, resulting in loss of genetic diversity.

There may be increased concentration of bloodline carrying genetic defects.

Ideals may not be economically driven or realistically attained

Demand for end product may not offer enough economic success to sustain the defined standard or ideal.

What will a breed standard define?

- General Appearance
- Physical and Reproductive Soundness
- Size and growth potential (maturity)
- Balance, Proportion and Capacity
- Body Conformation and structural correctness
- Fiber - density (fleece weight), fineness, uniformity (of fiber diameter, length and character), staple length, strength
- Character - color, brightness, luster, crimp/lock, staple formation, and handle
- Color purity
- Fiber placement and covering
- Undesirable traits to have prejudice against
- Disqualifying traits

Do we currently have a standard?

Yes...in judging fleece off the alpaca
“The AOBA Fleece Judging System is an ABSOLUTE system. All fleeces are judged by comparing them to an ideal fleece, which is expressed by a perfect score of 100 on the AOBA Suri or Huacaya Fleece Score Card. The score card is divided into sections, with each section describing a particular fleece characteristic and the maximum number of points allocated for the ideal of that characteristic” 2006 AOBA Show Handbook

While the allocation of points is outlined in the handbook, the definition of the "ideal" is not provided...are exhibitors to guess? Are these defined only for the judge?

What are the fleece ideals?

Fineness - 15% (huacaya) and 10% (suri) of fleece score off the alpaca

Top score in huacaya
17 microns - 6-12 months of age at shearing
20 microns - 13-24 months
22 microns - 25 months +

Top score in Suri
20 microns - 6-12 months of age at shearing

23 microns - 13-24 months
25 microns - 25 months +

Density (Fleece Weight) - 20% (huacaya) and 15% (suri) of fleece score off the alpaca

Top score in huacaya and suri
5 pounds (annualized growth) skirted prime blanket - 6-12 months of age at shearing

5.5 pounds (annualized growth) skirted prime blanket - 13 months +

Crimp - 10% of fleece score off the alpaca

Top points - very well defined crimp - in handbook:

Good crimp is defined as “very deep crimp in relation to crimp length, usually a high number of crimps per inch” (10 or more crimps per inch?)

Average crimp is medium crimp depth in relation to crimp length (5-7 crimps per inch?)

Poor is "A shallow crimp in relation to crimp length, usually very few crimps per inch."

Locks (suri) - 10% of fleece score off the alpaca

Top points - very well defined to skin, independent, locks. Handbook does not define type of lock; may be tight ringlet, wave with twist, corkscrew with twist, or large wave broad lock, but must be defined close to the skin

Uniformity of Micron (lack of Medullation) - 18% in huacaya, 13% in suri

Brightness - Luster - 10% in Huacaya, 20% in Suri

This leaves 27% in huacaya and 32% in suri for handle, staple length, color purity, staple formation, strength and condition.

The ideals used to judge fiber off the alpaca are very obviously not used to the same emphasis to judge fiber on the animal! Should they be the same? Will they be the same? Who will decide?

Up to now, a small group of very dedicated breeders and judges have determined the show standard ñ now it is your opportunity!

What are obstacles?

Reaching consensus on body conformation and structure - exceptions include eye color, pigmentation, bite/trimming, environmentally caused angular limb deformity, body score, length of muzzle, etc., and % emphasis given if score card is used.

Reaching consensus on fiber ideals or goals.

What is fine? 17-20-22 microns? Is fineness obtained at optimal (or minimal) nutrition?

What is ideal weight - 5 - 5.5 lbs? Is weight obtained at ideal fineness?

What is ideal character - 10-12 crimps per inch? Is higher curvature enough to matter?

Is the handle of lower frequency/amplitude crimped fiber softer?

Should several styles of lock and crimp be recognized? Are tightly twisted locks more difficult to process, does it matter?

What is ideal uniformity of fiber diameter (CV) - 20%?

What about comfort factor - % over 30 microns?

What is ideal scale height, length, frequency?

What is ideal staple length, and at what micron?

Purity of color - when is a fleece color contaminated? Commercial vs. hand-spun

Other factors - strength, bundles, handle, luster, brightness?

What about fiber placement and covering - top knot, face coverage, beard, ears, leg?

We can agree to write a general, minimum breed standard statement. Can this statement be the ideal?

Major obstacle ñ fear that the standard will change without our consent.

How can we develop a process that is inclusive (not exclusive), stable, slow and methodical, well researched, debated and deliberated over time?

Where should the Breed Standard reside? Who will control it? Should it be AOBA? ARI? Anyone else?

How can the industry guarantee that it

will always have the right to vote on any change?

Is this important enough to the AOBA membership to unite and vote to codify a change to the AOBA Bylaws?

Proposal: Creation of Breed Councils for Huacaya and Suri

Procedure:

AOBA Bylaws are amended to include Breed Council and Protocol (see below).

Breed Councils made of interested, eligible members are formed.

Breed Council elects Breed Council Administrator (two year term) by approval of 60% of breed council membership voting.

Initial proposed Breed Standard is mailed to all members of Breed Council.

Initial Breed Standard is approved by 60% of Breed Council membership voting.

AOBA Board ratifies Breed Standard.

Annually upon renewal of membership in Breed Council, member receives copy of current breed standard.

Proposals to amend or modify the Breed Standard are sent to the Breed Council Administrator, and distributed to all council members.

Proposals are discussed at a minimum of two semi-annual Breed Council meetings held at AOBA conferences.

Finalized Proposals are voted on by Breed Council members and accepted if receive 60% of membership voting.

AOBA Board must accept and ratify modifications to Breed Standard.

In Summary:

Standards can be beneficial to the alpaca industry if they are based upon

- Realistic ideals
- Broad industry support
- Steady, well-researched evolution
- A reasonable mechanism for change
- Promotion of genetic soundness.

Proposed Recommendation as amendment to AOBA Bylaws:

(Discussion Draft)

Article XIV. Breed Council

Breed Councils will be formed to

serve the AOBA Board of Directors in an advisory capacity regarding Huacaya and Suri Breed Standards.

14.1 Purpose:

Councils will consist of an unlimited number of eligible members of AOBA that wish to serve in an advisory capacity to channel opinions and suggestions from the individual breeder, show rules committee, etc. to the Board of Directors on changes to the established Breed Standards. Separate Breed Councils will be formed for Huacaya and for Suri Breed Standards. Breeders of both Huacaya and Suri can apply for membership on both councils.

14.2 Eligibility Requirements:

AOBA farm member in good standing

18 years or older

Have ARI owner code

Have registered an alpaca (of the breed) with ARI in past 3 years

Have shown an alpaca or fleece (of the breed) (owned or permission to show form) in an AOBA certified show in past 3 years

14.3 Membership:

Obtained by completing an annual application stating the above eligibility and paying a small fee to cover administrative costs of each council.

Annual membership January 1- December 31; membership application will not be accepted after 8/1 of any year.

One membership per AOBA Farm membership and ARI owner code

14.4 Fees:

The annual fee (January 1 through December 31) shall be set by the AOBA board of directors to defray the expense of administering the councils.

14.5 Breed Council Administrator(s) Huacaya and Suria.

a.) Requirements for Eligibility:

Current membership in specific Breed Council (Huacaya or Suri)

May be administrator for only one Breed Council at a time

b.) Election:

An administrator for each breed council will be elected from the membership and by the membership of that breed council.

Elections will held every two years during the month of December

A candidate must submit a declaration in writing to AOBA by August 1st to be considered for the December election.

Voting follows guidelines established for annual vote on Breed Standard Proposals

Any vacancy will be filled by majority vote of the AOBA board until the next annual election can be held.

14.6 Procedure for Submission of Proposals to Change Breed Standard:

- Standardized form for proposed change to standard, stating proposed change, section to be changed, and rationale.

- Breed standard proposals are sent to Huacaya or Suri Breed Council Administrator as appropriate.

- Breed Council Administrator distributes proposals to all members of appropriate breed council.

- Breed Council meetings are held at the AOBA Annual Conference, Suri Network Annual Meeting (suri breed standard proposals only) and AOBA Fiber to Fashion or Mid-Winter Conference.

Proposal must be reviewed at a minimum of two Breed Council meetings. This gives ample time for any proposed change to be fully debated both at and outside of breed council meetings, and have wording refined and finalized.

Final proposals are distributed to the Breed Council members (of record as of August 1) by written ballot in September of each year.

Ballots are returned to an approved CPA to confirm and tally and report to the Breed Council Administrator

Proposals receiving the affirmative vote of 60% of those voting are given to the AOBA board of directors to ratify and approve.

The AOBA board meets in November to ratify and approve changes to the Breed Standards.

The Board of Directors cannot alter or amend a Breed Standard without the change receiving 60% approval of the breed council members voting.

Breed Standard changes are adopted in show rules