

Cria Care from an Owner's Perspective

By Dolores Gardner

This article was written with 20 years experience but the author wishes to thank Dr. C. Norman Evans for his invaluable advice through the years and Dr. Edwin Brockway for being there when I needed him. As we discuss cria care we will talk about the full term cria and the premature cria. Their needs are the same in some areas and different in others.

I will assume the owner has done the following in preparation for all cria:

- Given the dam a dose of CDT 30 days prior to expected partuition (delivery). This seems to boost the immune system of the cria.

- Started the dam on chopped corn or other high-energy supplement for increased milk production. There are also new products on the market for this. Do some research. Several articles have been written on this subject.

When we discuss getting ready for the "big day", there are, of course, several different opinions regarding the preparation of the dam. Some folks like to stall the llama or alpaca so she can be monitored closely. Use caution when doing this. The

cria will be born on a dirty floor with all kinds of pathogens (interpret this as bacteria) and the mother will be separated from her herd and this could cause her stress. I move my expectant mothers to a front pasture with other expectant or new mothers. The cria is almost always born on fresh clean grass.

Now the cria is born. What next? Some owners give a series of inoculations to the baby, tube with colostrum and stall it with the mother until they see the cria nurse and pass the meconium (first) stool. Any injection in llamas (or humans for that matter) causes some stress on the body systems. This has been proven by certain elevated laboratory values. I personally weigh the cria, treat the cord and put the baby back with the mother. It has been my experience that the all the other llama (alpaca) aunts will aid the mother and baby to bond. My original llama is

be up and nursing within an hour or an hour and a half.

You may also check the IgG on your cria if you have the equipment. It is a fairly simple procedure that I will not discuss here. This can guide you in the necessity for colostrum or camelid plasma administration.

Afterwards you should weigh the cria at least every two days at the same time each day to check for adequate weight gain. It should gain about one-half to one pound per day. Remember a cria needs ten percent to its body weight to maintain its weight and

another five to eight percent to gain weight. If you consider your cria weighed 25 pounds, then it must ingest two and one half pounds of milk daily just to maintain. A pint weighs one pound, so the cria must consume about two and one-half pints a day to maintain and another six to eight ounces to gain. These camelids are milking machines! Realize this and feed your milking mothers more. Also consider you may be re-breeding them in about three weeks, so now they must grow a new baby and feed the present baby. What a woman! Aren't you glad you're a human and

not a llama or alpaca?

Now let's discuss the premature cria. So, you've done everything right and you still have a premature cria. By definition this is a cria of 16 pounds or less (llama) or 10 pounds or less (alpaca) or the teeth aren't erupted, the ears are floppy and it is down in the pasterns. So, what do you do?



Proper position for tubing

still with me just for this purpose. She watches both mother and baby and if she is not satisfied with the care the mother is giving, she gets the mother up and pushes the baby under her. It should not be necessary to tube every cria with colostrum if you have a good nutrition program and you are vigilant about parasite control. The cria should

Keep colostrum or camelid plasma at all times!!!! Keep colostrum or camelid plasma at all times!!! Get the hint? I keep a unit of frozen plasma in my freezer. I obtain this from Dr. Evans, but you can harvest your own (this is the most desirable scenario) or buy from another source. Your veterinarian can assist you in harvesting plasma if he has the equipment to separate the plasma from the whole blood. Mine does not, so I go to a source I trust. Plasma can be given intravenously, intraperitoneally or by mouth. Studies have shown the IgG is about the same for all. In a smaller cria, 300 milliliters is enough. If they can nurse, give it by bucket or bottle. Do not cuddle the cria. Give in divided doses, but all must be given within 24 hours.

You may also tube. If you opt for this, place the cria in kush position, measure the length from the mouth to the thoracic outlet (the area on the chest just above the sternum (breastbone)). Measure your tube and mark it. If you use a red rubber catheter or similar catheter, tie a length of string on it so the baby doesn't accidentally swallow it. I personally use a disposable enema bag. I measure and mark, then pour the plasma in the bag, lubricate the tube and gently place in the mouth and start advancing. You can feel the tube on the left side of the neck and many times you can see it passing. Do not be afraid of this. It is very difficult to get this in the lungs. If you happen to get it in the lungs, you will see respiratory distress and coughing.

Sometimes this is all you need to do for a premature cria. This will give it the little boost it needs to nurse on mom. Remember that a camelid baby is born hypoglycemic (low blood sugar) and hypothermic (low body temperature) (usually). Before you tube, check the body temperature rectally. It should be at least 98 or above. If it isn't and you tube anyway, you are risking the plasma just sitting there and not being utilized.

Now you have a cria that cannot stand and nurse. You must get some nutrition in the baby. The best thing to do is milk the dam and give this by bucket, bottle or tube. If it is a male, use the equipment in this order: bucket, tube and bottle. If it is a female, use the equipment in this order: bucket, bottle and tube.

Remember the formula from above. The baby must get ten percent of its body weight to maintain. If you cannot milk this much, then supplement with goat's milk diluted at 50:50, lamb replacer at 1: 4 (not 1: 3 as this could cause a blockage in the spiral colon) or plain whole milk with Vitamins A & D added. I have used all three with equally successful results. You may also give a product called STAT that is available at your veterinarian's office. A tablespoon twice a day will aid in weight gain. If you are using any replacement milk, give one ounce of live culture yogurt once a day. This helps establish the "good" bacteria in the colon. Again, weigh your cria at least every other day at the same time to monitor weight gain. Also be aware of the cria's general attitude and stool consistency. The main thing is to formulate a plan and stick to it. Don't change the formula unless you are not seeing weight gain (and you KNOW you are feeding the right amount).

When it is time to increase the amount of formula you are giving, increase about one percent in divided doses every three days. The very small camelid (12-16 pounds) should be fed about every three hours. The larger ones may be fed every four hours. They can absorb more liquid so can be fed greater amounts. After seven to ten days, you should be able to eliminate the night feeding, that is, those after ten PM and before six AM. You may wean the cria completely off the supplements at eight or so weeks. Make sure plenty of pellet supplements, grass and hay are available.

Check with your veterinarian about appropriate vaccinations for your area. At the very least you should give one milliliter of CDT at one week and every four weeks through 16 weeks.

Often lack of milk in the mother is caused by poor herd management. I know some breeders who only feed hay. This may work for several years, but at some point, the dams will have early babies, not carry their babies or not have enough milk. Proper nutrition, parasite control and vaccinations are imperative to the good health of camelids. Paying attention to details will make you and your camelids much happier.

This article is meant as a beginning point for the breeder. It is not designed to be all encompassing and address every scenario. With a little effort you can manage your full term crias and save your premature and orphaned crias.

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For Information or
Entry Forms Contact:

D. Keith

gfllamas@setel.com

859-234-2598

www.naileshow.com