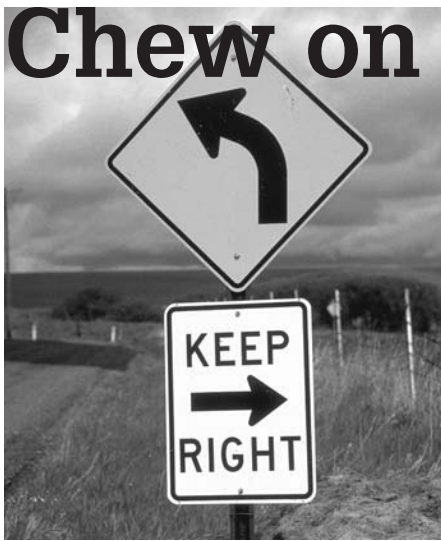


# Chew on This!



# Where Do We Go Now?

By Cheryl A. Cave

In my last column I took to task those llama breeders whose breeding strategies focused on fads and/or turning a quick dollar, at the expense of the long-term cost to the animal. In this column, I'd like to take the opportunity to compliment breeders on what they seem to be doing very well...and introduce a concept that has long benefited breeders of other species.

## Not What They Used to Be

A I gaze over the tapestry of llamas who weave their way through today's show-rings, I am impressed with the number of high quality animals I see. Be it a large show or small, the majority of the entries are correctly conformed, gracefully moving llamas. I can't help remembering not too many years ago when these same shows boasted only a handful of llamas as good as these. Most of the entries were "ok", with some good traits and some bad traits. Perhaps as many as a third of the animals were...well, they did not display many positive traits in accordance with show organization standards of llama conformation. No doubt each of these was a beloved pet entered by a proud owner temporarily afflicted with a case of "barn blindness". I know I've been stricken with this vision ailment and I suspect you may have as well. Still, when I think of the number of "marginal" entries of shows past in contrast with these 21st-century competitors, I can't suppress a feeling of pride in the strides made by North American llama breeders in such a short amount of time.

What changed? I believe that the diversity of local, national, and international llama associations deserve the credit for educating and leading the llama community.

## Look At Those Legs!

Call me politically incorrect, but I remember llama competitors of the not too distant past who didn't seem to have any two legs going in the same direction. I told myself they were simply throwbacks to the Pushme-Pullyou's from literature's Dr. Doolittle. I recall the owner of one such

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llama bragging on its gorgeous banana-shaped ears. Beautiful ears indeed, but do they contribute to the overall soundness of the animal and its progeny? Yep, it was a classic case of "barn-blind from the ears down"...a rare, but well-documented strain of this optical delusion.

## Bone-A-Petite

What happened to the fine bone structures of the llamas of the 1980s and 90s? In browsing through the conformation standards of llama organization literature I do not see anything that openly or specifically endorses substantial bone, though it does seem to be the "skeleton du jour." I confess, however, that I can't help but admire the symmetry of a llama whose bone structure seems sturdy, proportionate and well suited to its gender and to the tasks traditionally performed by our camelid companions. Gone are the days of the chiseled, refined bone structure that seemed to droop under the weight and bulk of the animal. On the other hand, few animals can adequately accommodate the "tree trunk" legs fanatically revered by many contemporary breeders. Sure, I'm opinionated, but my experience has been (and I believe history supports me on this) that tree trunks are typically best suited as the base of actual trees. This is a characteristic that may soon join the ranks of those "good things that were taken to the extreme."

## The Bad Hair Days

What's more, in the blink of an eye llama fiber seems to have evolved from something akin to a steel-wool pad to luxurious, high-quality locks that are far more marketable. I tip my felted hat to those breeders who identified and pursued a camelid characteristic that could position llamas more competitively in the capitalist, profit-driven economy in which we compete. Thanks to these

