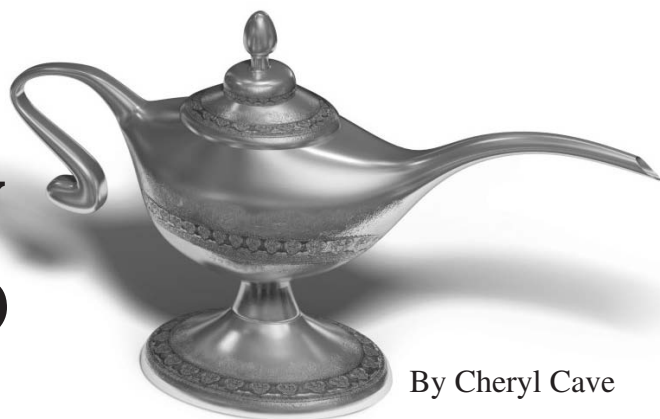


Chew on This!

Do You Know What I Wish?



By Cheryl Cave

I wish there were an equivalent number of sanctioned shows in each region, or better yet, each state. This would allow a fairer evaluation of an animal's true competitive value. As things stand, there are areas where there is literally a show (or more) each week, as well as areas where there are only a handful of shows per year. If a buyer is considering an animal from an area with few shows, he may note that the animal has fewer win points or titles than one from another area. He may mistakenly believe the animal with the greater number of wins is the finer animal. This is not necessarily true. (I understand llama ownership is not spread equally across the U.S. and question whether this has been influenced more by lack of exposure to llamas than by lack of interest in them.)

I wish our national level shows were held in a location central to all breeders in the continental U.S. I remember a time, not too long ago, when the ALSA national show was held in a fairly central locale. In those days it was very well attended. In those days, when my stud placed 4th, it meant something. It meant something because there were 32 in his class. It meant something because the competitors had all placed very high locally or regionally. These days, where there are only eight animals in a class, placing in the top ten holds little significance. Moreover, placing in a juvenile class against animals who didn't have to qualify to get there has even less meaning. That being said, why would I spend the time, money, and energy to participate in an event like that? Although I cite the ALSA national as an example, it is not my intent to point the finger only at them. This should be a concern for every camelid show association. Wouldn't it be nice for these organizations to pool their resources - financial, physical, and

emotional - to build or purchase a central facility to be used by all? When the facility is not being used for camelid events it could be booked for other activities. If coordinated wisely, this might well pay for the annual maintenance of the facility.

I wish judges could not be certified to judge a performance class, if they have not personally participated in performance competitions. There is a difference between understanding the mechanics of the competition versus standing at the end of the lead rope with an animal in this environment. I believe the same is true for all classes and competitions at sanctioned shows.

I wish camelid organizations would work together to improve the new owner experience, the perpetuation of the species, and the marketability of the animals.

I wish llama breeders and alpaca breeders had more combined events. This would provide more exposure and a greater learning experience for breeders and the public alike.

I wish camelid organizations would work together to generate a greater appreciation and market for camelid fiber. Starbucks made a fortune by telling us we should pay three times the price for an everyday item. We need for consumers to understand the exquisite qualities of our fibers in contrast to sheep's wool or cotton. Americans in particular will pay a premium for a "status" product.

I wish camelid organizations would work with county agents, animal advancement organizations, and city governments to help them understand that camelid ownership is not just for folks with expansive ranches.

I wish camelid organizations would work together to sponsor camelid auctions/sales in each quadrant of the

continental U.S. annually. Potential buyers could easily find a forum where they know they will be able to evaluate and select from a wide representation of animals each year. Currently, various breeders (and organizations) sporadically schedule sales when dictated by their herd population. It is difficult for someone outside our "circle" to be made aware of these.

I wish camelid organizations would work together to educate school agricultural programs and 4H programs that camelids are valuable stock, and the lessons learned in sharing life with these gentle creatures is (at least) equal to that of other livestock promoted through their programs.

And, most of all:

I wish each of you will have the passion to choose one of these areas and work tirelessly to improve the situation. I hope you'll let me know when you do, because I would be happy to work with you.

You can reach me at llamasofwaldenpond@gmail.com.

About the author:

Since 1987, Cheryl has been captivated by llamas. In 1998 she and husband, Tom, purchased a home with acreage and bought their first two llamas. By 2002 their herd size exceeded 60. Cheryl has been involved in many facets of llama care, shearing and consulting professionally. In 2001 Cheryl traveled to Chile to select and import several Argentine llamas. She has enjoyed a great deal of success in the show ring, with a national champion and several ALSA hater champions to her credit. Cheryl is currently writing a book intended for new llama owners. She also writes a column for an international software publication.