

Navigating the Confusion:

Do Accurate Certificates of Registration Really Matter?

By Dale Peterson

In the mid eighties, when the first lama registry was proposed, many roadblocks had to be overcome. At that time, the lama industry in the United States was very young. Enthusiasm about llamas (llamas) was growing. The time had come to establish a registry, putting llama ownership on firm footing. As with cattle, horses, goats, etc., a registry could legitimize and add value to camelid ownership. Some believed there was a need for a registry; others opposed the idea; others were indifferent. However, through the perseverance of a few dedicated individuals, the idea moved forward, and eventually the registry (International Lama Registry, ILR), became the norm.

As in any new venture, this norm did not come without its share of mistakes, which themselves have become the norm today. These mistakes were perpetuated in various ways.

Early on, large breeders often had to guess (for registry purposes) which of their males were the sires of different offspring. In many cases they guessed wrong, and by the time their mistakes were discovered there were hundreds of "llamas" registered inaccurately. Other breeders also guessed wrong, which led to hundreds, if not thousands of "llamas" that were inaccurately registered. During the past two decades, others also have "guessed wrong" about parentage - some honest mistakes and some that appear to be outright deception. To this day many

of the mistakes have not been corrected and deceptions continue. This perpetuation of mistakes and deceptions means any certificates of registration tying back to those "llamas" and their offspring are incorrect.

Adding to the registry's inaccurate record keeping was the registering as screened LL (pure llamas), "llamas" that arrived in the United States from South America during the importation years. The strong appetite by the United States for new "lama" blood lines - or any "llamas" for that matter - caused a rush by professional importers to satisfy that hunger. These importers scurried the countryside of South America looking for "campesino free range llamas and alpacas," rounding-up as many as they could for shipment to the United States. These importers were not responsible for determining purity of animals they imported; they were in the business of filling orders and getting paid for services rendered.

In South America professional importers would corral what they thought were llamas in one pen and what they thought were alpacas in another pen. (At this juncture, "llamas" were the prized camelids, so very few alpacas were imported). All were then shipped to the United States where "so-called knowledgeable people/breeders" (for registry purposes) made the final cut of which camelids were mostly llama and which camelids were mostly alpaca. (In some cases, these knowledgeable people/breeders were the same ones who previously guessed

wrong about their own animals' genealogy.) Then the camelids were registered as screened LL (pure llamas) or as alpacas.

Question: if these "knowledgeable people/breeders" selected the camelids that looked mostly like a llama and declared them "llamas" and selected the camelids that looked mostly like an alpaca and declared them "alpacas," then what did the other parts of those camelids look like - each other?



Soon came the large breeders/importers from the United States who horned in on the importation process. Their main focus was not the purity of the breed either, but only the purity of the dollar. These breeders/importers, wearing the blanket of "large, knowledgeable United States llama breeders," claimed they could look at any camelid and say, "Yes ... this is a pure llama... and no... that is a hybrid/cross-breed... and... yes... that camelid is a pure alpaca." Strange, since more than a decade down the road, DNA analysis still has not evolved to that point. Nevertheless, those camelids found their way into the United States, where they and their offspring were registered as LL (pure llamas) or as alpacas, which in turn created even more inaccuracies that diluted even further any

semblance of accurate registry record keeping.

Even more dilution of accurate record keeping occurred when that same registry issued then, and continues to issue to this day, LL (pure llama) certificates of registration that plainly state that one or more parent is UNKNOWN. If one or more parent is unknown, then there is absolutely no way to accurately determine the true makeup of the camelid being registered. Yet, this registry proclaims with absolute certainty that a camelid with one or more unknown parent(s) is indeed a pure llama.

DNA was introduced to the camelid community over a decade ago and micro-chip identification was introduced even earlier. Even so, this registry refuses to demand that all camelids it registers be DNAd and micro-chipped. WHY? If one had to guess, most likely DNA could prove that an overwhelming number of the certificates of registration issued by this registry are inaccurate.

To demonstrate just how easy it is to have a (LL) "pure llama" registration certificate issued by this registry, note these simple steps:

1. Take a picture of a baby llama - any baby llama.
2. Pick a sire - any sire - that is registered with this registry - doesn't matter if he is alive or dead, so long as he has not been reported dead to this registry.
3. Pick a dam - any dam - that is registered with this registry - doesn't matter if she is alive or dead, so long as she has not been reported dead to this registry.
4. Fill out the form, check the box marked LL (pure llama), write a check, place the check, photos and form in an envelope and mail it to that registry. NO DNA or any other kind of proof is required that what you are sending that registry is accurate.

5. Wait a few days, and your LL (pure llama) certificate of the registration will arrive in the mail.

Could this method of registration explain the recent explosion of the so-called "ancient suri llama breed" in North America? Could the temptation to make a quick buck and the ease with which one can creatively register just about anything as a LL llama with this registry be driving the deception? Could this phenomenon be the rebirth of a similar practice we saw nearly two decades ago when almost overnight the traditional type llama with short fiber and a large frame was turned into a heavy fibered one of shorter stature and a different body type (more akin to that of a huacaya alpaca)?

Organizations like ALSA require all camelids be registered with this registry before they can be shown in an ALSA sanctioned event. Auctions such as the Celebrity and LFA and others also require camelids that are sold and/or shown at their events be registered with this registry. Why, and to what end? On the auction side of the equation, shouldn't people be allowed to buy, breed and sell to anyone that desires their products? On the showing side of the equation, shouldn't there be a **standard** that judges are trained to compare against, thereby



elevating the animals in the shows that most nearly meet this standard and eliminating the animals that compare less to this standard? Just a thought.

AOBA members (Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association), recognizing the need for a competent and legitimate registry with a credible method of registering its alpacas, fired this registry and commissioned their own registry, ARI (Alpaca Registry, Inc.). ARI was created specifically to protect the alpaca gene pool in North America by identifying alpacas and establishing a scientific and documented lineage. ARI mandated blood-typing as a prerequisite for registration. The decision to require blood-typing from its inception set ARI apart from llamas and put it on firm footing to create legitimacy and a credible database to track parentage and bloodlines of alpacas, thereby increasing their value and helping alpaca owners make wise breeding and purchasing decisions. In 1998 ARI's requirement for blood-typing turned to DNA. ARI is a closed DNA registry and currently only registers alpacas that are DNA verified to ARI registered parents.

Although 1999 was the last year alpacas were imported into the United States from South America, when they were imported - and with lessons learned from the llama importation missteps - great care was taken by the professional importers and their strategic breeder partner, Dr. Anthony Stachowski, to attract only the best bloodlines possible for importation. They did not spend their time scurrying the countryside of South America hoping to gather up "campesio free-range alpacas." They approached reputable alpaca breeders and purchased quality stock for importation. Hence, the Accoyo and Alianza lines of alpacas that continue to demand a premium among United States alpaca breeders.

To make up for the severe financial gap caused by the exit of ARI, the ILR

has tried to do outside contract administration work for other organizations and registries such as ARF, AMLA and most recently, the SLA. The main requirement of this registry when seeking work from other registries is that every animal must first be registered with this registry. What's the point of another registry, if that registry is required to contain inaccurate information to get started?

Apparently the SLA (Suri Llama Association) and ARF (The Alpaca Research Foundation) also were dissatisfied with this registry's performance, because they too have now fired them.

Eventually, mounting pressure over the fallacies of the screening process caused the ILR to suspend registration of imported camelids until at least 2008. Some say the suspension came much too late. The damage had already been done, and it is irreversible. The importation issues may have been second in line - behind the indiscriminate breeding practices of the initial United States camelid breeders - to creating an inaccurate registry. These problems continue to be exacerbated by the unwillingness of this registry to change with the times and require proof before it registers a camelid. Ford's Model "T" automobile was the greatest when it was introduced, but, as time and technology marched on, so did automobile makers' products. Not so with this registry's core product: accurate llama genealogical information.

...which brings us to the question: How can this registry be fixed? It cannot, but there may always remain a need for camelids to have some sort of registration papers - despite how inaccurate they may be. This registry certainly was well intentioned at inception, but circumstances over time have led to multiple wrong choices and decisions. Some decisions apparently were made purely for self-serving purposes, while others were nothing more than errors. So, it

seems this registry has created a conundrum from which there is no solution. Even so, we should acknowledge the many well-intentioned individuals who poured countless hours of their time into this registry. For the most part, their efforts will never be appreciated by the masses.

To answer the question at the beginning of this article: "Do accurate certificates of registration really matter?" I believe they do. I also believe they do not come without some inconvenience and some extra cost, which begs the question, "Do you want nothing more than a piece of paper with nothing to back it up, or do you want a registration certificate that creates value for your llama and is backed up with DNA, microchip identification and parent verification from the outset?" If you want the latter and wish to have credible registration certificates, consider the CLR (Certified Llama Registry).

The CLR doesn't pretend to have all of the answers. All the CLR can do at this juncture is "draw a line in the sand" and say from this point forward accountability and accuracy of record keeping are the new benchmarks.

Proof will be required before a llama can be registered with the CLR. Llamas with one or more unknown parent(s) will not be registered. They may be entered into the "Seed Stock" category during a grace period and must be DNA'd and micro-chipped. All Suri llamas will be hands-on, phenotype classified, DNA'd and micro-chipped before they can be registered.

The CLR does not and will not attempt to determine or declare purity of the llamas it registers; rather it will be an accurate record keeper of the genealogy of the llamas in its registry. It will be up to the CLR's sub-registries, owners, breeders, buyers and sellers to determine which breeding direction they wish to follow. Most importantly, The CLR will not tolerate dishonesty, but recognizes those who prefer to be dishonest will find ways to circumvent any system.

The CLR provides a platform for all llamas to be registered accurately without discrimination. Therefore, there is no reason for dishonesty. Go to www.TheCLI.org and click on "The Registry" to learn more about The CLR.

