



## Basic Alpaca Health

Alpaca CheQA

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This module is aimed at optimising health and welfare of alpacas on farms that participate in Alpaca CheQA. Farmers should work through the following steps in conjunction with their veterinarian to define, summarise and guide monthly farm duties using the Alpaca CheQA template provided. Many of the points are expanded upon in the appendices for ease of access to participants and their advisors.

- **Attain a property identification code (PIC)** from your state department of agriculture. It is compulsory for all livestock owners in every state to have a PIC. The PIC plays a vital role in tracing and controlling disease and contacting owners in emergencies. Use your computer search engine to locate the appropriate application form in your state.
- **Ensure boundary fences are secure** from stray livestock entering/exiting farm. This is a cornerstone of disease prevention. Boundary fences suitable for sheep and goats are suitable for alpacas, such as ring-lock with 2 plain wires on the top; preferably avoid barb wire. Internal fences could be 7-strand plain wire. Employ a local fencing contractor if you do not have the ability to secure it yourself. To assist with budgeting, cost estimates can be found online e.g. <https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/agbiz-tools-business-and-finance-farm-operations/resource/1ea38755-0159-4aec-89a4-0c5dd83f24b7>.
- **Use legible paddock ear tags on all livestock**, over and above IAR brass tags, so you can accurately identify your stock without having to catch each animal. In future there will be recommended ear tags that will align with future NLIS tagging, currently IAR brass tags are sufficient.
- **Meet Duty of Care requirements.** Every person has a duty of care to the animals they manage as part of state legislation. The Australian Veterinary Association has compiled a [Code of Welfare for Alpacas and Llamas, \(2016\)](#), which sets out in detail minimum standards and guidelines pertaining to all aspects of camelid husbandry, to help farmers understand fundamental obligations relating to animals in their care.
- **Active daily monitoring of stock for health.** Get out amongst your animals daily to observe and enjoy! Check face, feet & fibre every animal, every day. Call your local veterinarian if signs of illness including reluctance to eat or drink, reluctance to move, walk or stand, any female trying to give birth without signs of progression over 30 minutes (be especially attentive after 2 pm) or there is evidence of prolapse of vagina/uterus/rectum.
- **Isolate and treat sick stock under veterinary supervision:**
  - a. Treat sick animals after healthy ones. e.g. routine vitamin D treatments.
  - b. Observe withholding periods (WHP) for any medications used as directed by your veterinarian.
  - c. Record all husbandry procedures and treatment dates/doses methodically and permanently to monitor WHPs
- **Provision of adequate feed and water.** Alpacas need access to clean water and suitable pasture, with hay and other supplements as necessary.
  - a. Regular body condition scoring of your herd (Appendix x) is a rapid, simple, cheap method of assessing alpaca health and nutrition. Aim to maintain alpacas in BCS>2. Investigate reasons behind loss of body condition, including assessment of feed quality and quantity, and monitoring of gastrointestinal parasitism (see Point 9 in this section).



- b. Check water sources regularly; keep troughs clean; minimise stagnant water; secure water sources from contamination by ferals/pests.
- c. Monitor grazing practices: Longer pasture (>3 cm height) reduces intake of worms/coccidia/microbes; and reduces weed growth and erosion.
- **Design and implement an annual health program in consultation with your local veterinarian.** This should include:
  - a. A 5-in-1 clostridial vaccination schedule (Vaccination Protocol)
  - b. Vitamin D supplementation of 6000 iu/kg injected subcutaneously in May, July and September to alpacas < 3yo and late pregnant females
  - c. Quarantine worm drench of livestock onto farm (Internal Parasites).
  - d. Regular monitoring for worms/fluke using faecal egg counting (Internal Parasites; [Studies on Gastrointestinal Nematodes \("worms"\) of Alpacas \(2018\)](#))
- **Functional handling facilities.** Set up laneways and yards to enable clean mustering and low stress handling. Permanent handling facilities can be simple, but should ideally be accessed by a laneway system, be covered, and include a holding yard for a group of alpacas, which leads into some smaller yards (with gates that swing both ways) for ease of catching individual alpacas for routine husbandry procedures such as shearing and vaccination. More elaborate facilities could include a race with permanent weigh scales installed and a system to individually restrain alpacas.
- **Annual shearing in spring.** Lice treatment as indicated (Lice Treatment). Shearers' clothing and gear clean/lice-free. Do not use shearer's vaccines/drenches etc. unless you can ensure the vaccine/vitamin D/de-wormer has had cold chain provenance, is sterile and only new needles and syringes are used.
- **Provision of shelter belts/shedding.** Adult alpacas are particularly prone to exposure during extreme climatic events in the 4-6 weeks after shearing, as are all crias, weaners and yearlings/tuis at any time of the year. Keep a weather-eye out for impending extreme weather events and provide shelter accordingly. e.g. if shearing machos early in spring, be prepared to shed and supplementary feed them if the weather turns wet and cold.
- **Minimum castration requirements.** Machos are usually castrated from 9 months of age onwards, when testes have grown and are easier to locate, and farmers are ready to select breeding males based on attributes such as conformation, fibre quality and testicular size.
  - a. *Pain relief must be used* (as is legislated in all Australian states; see Appendix x).
  - b. *Rubber rings must not be used* (see page 59 in [Castration methods of alpacas, AgriFutures, 2017](#)).
  - c. *Do not sell intact males as guard animals/pets* as machos can be indiscriminate with species they try to mate.
- **Buy new alpacas from Alpaca CheQA farms** and obtain a completed copy of each vendor's waybill ([National South American Camelid Declaration and Waybill](#)). Provide same when selling alpacas. Encourage others to participate in the Alpaca CheQA program to promote good husbandry practices and optimise welfare across the national alpaca herd.
- **Transportation of alpacas.** Ensure best practice animal welfare when preparing, loading, transporting and delivering alpacas. Read the [Is the animal fit to load? \(2019\)](#) guide, which succinctly outlines the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for the Land Transport of Livestock.



- **Showing of alpacas**
  - a. [Health status declaration for shows and sales](#)
  - b. Ensure pens clean before unloading; take own feed/water; do not share equipment; isolate 10 days on return
  - c. [Show and sale venue audit](#) for show organisers.
- **Methods of euthanasia and carcass disposal.** It is not acceptable to turn a blind eye and leave an animal die in a paddock. Indicators for euthanasia include uncontrollable pain and distress, inability to walk, and high risk of injury/disease to humans/animals. Options for humane killing include veterinary intervention or use of a captive bolt (once trained in how, when and where to use the device). Appropriate carcass disposal includes use of a knackery or burial in a manner that does not impact land, water or air.
- **Staff care and training:**
  - a. Ensure appropriate personal protective equipment is available and in use, which may include overalls, disposable gloves, helmet if riding motorbike, appropriate mask for chemical handling.
  - b. Current vaccinations to protect against diseases associated with livestock including tetanus and Q fever.
  - c. Regular training (maintain training record) includes but is not limited to:
    - i. Animal husbandry and health
    - ii. Hygiene and biosecurity
    - iii. Chemicals: safe handling, on-label use, WHPs.