

Notes on Beans, Part I

By Marj Brady

Do you ever stop and think about just how much time we spend looking at poop? I thought when my kids got past a certain age I'd lose the obsessive poop observation practices I'd developed as a parental unit but I bought alpacas and lo and behold I have a new use for that skill!

At our farm we clean up twice a day, year round, unless the weather is really, really nasty like a torrential rainstorm or howling blizzard. This gives me ample opportunity to scrutinize and analyze the beans. We watch for anything out of the ordinary and have fecal tests run a few times a year just to be sure nothing is amiss in parasite land. I probably should learn to run my own fecals but the idea of having beans deliberately strewn throughout my house on top of the pre-existing chaos deters me. For now I'll let the vet have it done at the university.

Some of my poop paranoia has rubbed off on hubby and now he studies as he scoops too. I get reports of ploppy green poop when the alpacas get out on new spring pasture, mucus plugs, big beans, mini rice beans, orange coloured cria beans, ghostly beige milky beans but rarely is there anything that calls for a medical intervention.

A year or two ago, in the midst of crias arriving and girls being rebred he came to me with a grave expression, saying he had



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found something in one of the manure piles that he needed me to see. He held out a gloved hand and revealed a small bent twisted wet thing. I immediately assumed the worst and thought he had found a fetus and my stomach hit my boots; nope, it was a piece of a tree root. He initially had thought it was an aborted fetus but when he realized what it really was he thought it was hilarious and wanted to share the funny. But first... he wanted to see my reactions. I came close to killing him that day.



The grey and gnarly they (marketing gurus and advertisers) would have you believe that all alpacas poop in one tidy little spot and some alpacas will even rake and transport said beans to a common holding area pending distribution to the gardens. The truth is that most alpacas poop in sort of the same area but that some alpacas will start their pile in front of gates and stall doorways and persuade the others to contribute to the collection at leisure. Some alpacas will sniff the pile

and, rather than turning around, and hovering over the pile, will fire at will expanding the perimeter of the pile five to six feet each time they go. Some get lined up alright but when the herd leaves their vicinity they feel they have to follow, walking and dribbling beans as they go.

Some alpacas (mostly little cria monsters) will sneak away and poop whenever and wherever they feel the need which presents two problems:

- 1) A new pile may be created and remain undiscovered for several days, and...
- 2) you may think the little darlings aren't going and think they're going to become impacted and die and you may feel the need to chase them around the fields to give them an enema which they really don't need or want. Trust me; if you can't catch them they probably don't need an enema.

Alpacas have enriched my life, my garden and my hayfield in any number of entertaining ways and for that I'm thankful. However, I really do wish it were true that they all pooped in the same spot!

CQ

About the Author

Marj. Brady has been breeding entertaining huacaya alpacas since 2003 and lives with her family on a small farm north of Stirling, Ontario, Canada.



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