

# GRAND CANYON ALPACA ASSOCIATION

## MINIMUM STANDARDS OF CARE FOR YOUR ALPACAS

Alpacas are domesticated South American members of the camelid family and cousins of llama. They exist throughout the US and internationally. They are approved as livestock animals (in some States, not in Arizona) with fiber production as their purpose. In addition, alpacas exist as breeding, production or pet quality. Care and handling of alpacas is unique due to their nature as an intelligent herd animal. Understanding their care and handling will benefit their lifespan and production characteristics. With proper care alpacas can enjoy many years of good health. Alpacas thrive in an environment where the relationship with people and other animals is peaceful, basic security is provided and activities fit their nature. Region specific conditions present variables to maintaining the health and well-being of the animals. Consideration for nutrition, physical environment, shelter, social environment, routine husbandry, safe handling and safekeeping will benefit alpaca ownership for an enjoyable experience

**1. WATER:** Alpacas should have continuous access to potable drinking water. Water should be cool enough to touch to encourage consumption and avoid dehydration.

**2. NUTRITION:** Alpacas should have nourishment adequate to sustain life and health. Daily access to forage such as nutritious pasture or hay should be provided to ensure adequate sources of protein and other nutrients. Supplements might be required.

**3. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT:** The health of the alpaca will benefit from an environment that is protected and maintained to prevent undue stress. This area should be cleaned to eliminate manure and urine build up. Fencing should be sufficient height and strength to both contain the alpaca and protect from predators. Fencing should be secure to prevent the alpaca from becoming entangled. Barbed wire and electric fence are not recommended. Alpacas should be safeguarded from injury or death within their defined living environment and/or when traveling (ie, adequate trailer size and ventilated).

**4. SHELTER:** Alpacas should have natural or man-made shelter that enables them to find relief in adverse weather conditions and environmental conditions (ie, extreme heat, humidity, precipitation, waterlogged ground/standing water). A sheltered area should be ventilated and also provides protection for hay, fans or other necessities. Alpacas appreciate an open sheltered area to allow them to visualize their surroundings due to their prey instincts. The sheltered area must allow for the ability to stand, lie down, rest and reasonably move about.

**5. MOBILITY:** Alpaca should have a living area through which they can move freely and exercise independently. They are browsing and grazing animals and need the space to accommodate their nature. This can be a pasture area or 'dry lot' (with supplemented nutrition). Space requirements are dictated by the County in which the animals reside. For example Yavapai County in Arizona is 5 Alpacas per acre (this may vary from County to County and State to State.)

**6. SOCIALIZATION:** Alpacas are herd animals and should not live alone **without at least one companion animal of the same sex.** and should be in sight of other herd animals. Alpaca cria (a baby alpaca under six months) should always be allowed to remain with their dam a minimum of six months to develop normal behaviors and resulting good nutrition due to maturation of the forestomach. **Crias should NEVER be sold as pets for the purpose of bottle feeding.** Bottle feeding should take place in a herd environment and only when medically necessary to ensure the health of the dam and/or cria. **A cria should not be raised apart from other alpacas.** Alpacas have a gentle and curious nature but in general might not act appropriately when interacting with people. They have a highly sophisticated body language that might include spitting, kicking or running.

**7. SAFE HANDLING:** Halters should be used for leading and not kept on the animal in their environment for extended periods of time. Halter fit is imperative to prevent life-threatening situations in addition to helping the alpaca feel comfortable. Alpaca secured via tying without supervision at any time should be avoided.

**8. HUSBANDRY:** A camelid experienced veterinarian and supportive mentor are beneficial for successful ownership. Regions vary in requirements and needs. Physical assessment to evaluate weight, body score, membrane color, fiber coat changes, teeth and toenail growth and general condition help to determine health needs (ie, parasite management, vaccinations) diet, environmental and other modifications. A shearing schedule must be adopted once a year which will prevent excessive fiber growth to avoid heat stress.

**9. CRUELTY and NEGLECT:** Alpacas should be reasonably safeguarded from cruel treatment and actions that endanger life or health or cause avoidable suffering. Alpacas should have a physical appearance free from signs of serious neglect. Signs of serious neglect may include such things as crippled ambulation due to severely curled toenails, ingrown halters, an excess of fiber, or living conditions not meeting the Minimum Standards of Care.