

The Tale of Four Females

By Lark L. Burnham, PhD

The four females described below represent the range of problems (or lack of them) that obese alpacas experience. The number of symptoms displayed by these animals is also correlated to the amount of excess fat they carried.

1) **Oro's April** (owner Brenda Hanes, of Stewart Heritage Farm, Xenia, Ohio)

April seemed to be unaffected by her weight, which was almost a 10 (on the 1-10 scale) prior to giving birth to twins. The twins are healthy and April has plenty of milk. Further inquiry revealed that she required more than one breeding to conceive.

2) **Benchmark's Trecoyo Whirlwind** (owned by Nancy Wright, of Always Accoyo, Oxford, MI)

According to Nancy, whirlwind was a big girl when she came to the farm, and just kept getting bigger. This female displays more of the symptoms of obesity



trouble conceiving and lower quality fleece. She has yet to bear any offspring, although she was reported pregnant in January. Whirlwind has been bred and appeared to be pregnant before. Current status is unclear.

3) **Two females agisted by a producer who wishes to remain anonymous**

These females were already morbidly obese (probably two times their ideal weight) when they came to this farm. The agister tried restricting them to roughage only (hay and pasture), but only one girl lost weight, and this was only a few pounds. These females suffered from the worst symptoms of obesity: painful joints, including hips, legs, and feet, as well as conception issues.

Animals in a condition similar to the last two must be limit-fed to induce weight loss, and their continued survival. This means limited time on pasture or feeding only small amounts of hay.

The latter females were allowed to gain so much weight because their owner was trying to be kind. Grain-based supplement was over-fed. The first thing that should be removed from an obese alpaca's diet is grain and grain-based supplement.

April has lost weight due to lactation and two healthy crias. Lactation is a natural form of weight loss, but many obese animals have difficulty conceiving or carrying a pregnancy to term. If feed restriction seems cruel, consider the last two females above. They were in great pain. Your fatty will be healthier and more productive if their weight is brought down close to ideal.

About the Author:

Lark Burnham received a B.S. in Animal Science (1979) from Kansas State University and an M.S. in non-ruminant nutrition (1995) from Kansas State University, Manhattan, and a Ph.D. Doctorate in ruminant nutrition (2004) from Texas Tech University, Lubbock. Her special interests are comparative nutrition, the role of the micro flora in all mammals, fiber digestion, and probiotics. Lark currently works for Natur's Way, Inc., Horton, KS which produces MSE probiotics.

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ALPACA FARM



Cria-ting Quality

Fred & Nancy Medland
11399 Taylor Rd.
Plain City, Ohio 43064
Phone: (614) 873-4285
Cell: (614) 738-3015
Email: f.n.medland@gmail.com

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