

# Breed Standards - the end of the beginning?

By Adrian Stewart

Nothing polarizes a group of alpaca breeders more than a discussion on breed standards. To illustrate this point, I should tell you how the old AOBA Board of Directors forced through a by-law change that declared there would be no alpaca breed standards established without two-thirds of the AOBA membership voting in favor of the proposed standard. A group of irate breeders filed suit and the Colorado Appeals Court ultimately reversed the old AOBA Board decision.

However, I am pleased to say the process to determine what alpaca breed standard AOBA and ARI members will adopt (if indeed they adopt one at all), is at long last underway.

Originally, it was planned to hold a national conference in November 2005 followed by a vote.

After a great deal of heated debate, that plan was changed and the new process started with a series of Regional Type Conferences. The first of these was on December 10th in Springfield, Massachusetts and the process will now conclude with a two day National Type Conference in early November 2006, followed by an all member (AOBA and ARI) vote in early February 2007.

This is going to be a long process, to some it may look over engineered and cumbersome but the strength of feeling on this issue really cannot be overstated, this is a political hot potato.

The "for" and "against" camps are now firmly entrenched and trade blows via the various alpaca web based discussion forums on a regular basis, meanwhile a significant number of members remain firmly on the fence.

The purpose behind the regional type conferences approach is three fold; firstly to educate members about what is involved in establishing and maintaining an alpaca breed standard, secondly to give everyone an opportunity to contribute towards defining an acceptable alpaca breed standard and finally the vote.

To achieve this, the various conferences will all have to adopt a similar format:

Each conference will have a panel of veterinarians who will present on basic alpaca anatomy, form and function matters and discuss how a breed standard would affect the overall health, anatomy and function of alpacas. A panel of experienced AOBA certified judges would give a presentation on how alpacas are judged in the show ring and how a breed standard would affect judging of alpacas.

Currently we use a relative system for halter judging and an absolute system for fleece judging. A breed standard would not therefore affect the results of a given class, but most judges believe it would help make the judging more consistent from show to show.

Each regional type conference then decides what characteristics would make up an acceptable alpaca breed standard. Features such as fleece character, head type, muzzle length, top line structure and bone density. Each of these features is then discussed in small groups and at the end of the day, a position paper is written for that particular regional conference.

Each position paper is then circulated to the entire AOBA membership. The AOBA and ARI boards will then take the regional position papers, sort the results into an aggregate "beginning document" for the final Type Conference. This will go through exactly the same process as the regional conferences.

The ending document will be the final document voted upon by the membership after it has been circulated, reviewed and discussed by the entire AOBA and ARI membership. Now Australia and Canada already have breed standards but I suspect breeders in the UK and in the rest of Europe will be watching the outcome with interest.

So the first regional type conference is now over and appears to have gone reasonably well.

There is a feeling that the first conference was too pro breed standards and that it would have been better served if there had been an expert to speak against breed standards. The AOBA board say that try as they might they were unable to find an expert who would take on that role.

As Winston Churchill once said: "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

Meanwhile, despite the lack of high profile auctions a new world record price was recently achieved for a male alpaca. Ernie and Barbara Kellogg of Double "O" Good Alpacas and Mike and Robin Tierney of Maple Brook Alpacas recently purchased PPPeruvian Royal Fawn a full Accoyo male from Camelids of Delaware for \$600,000 (£338,000).

Royal Fawn is the only light fawn Accoyo ever exported from Don Julio Barreda's herd and was the 1999 and 2000 "Get-of-Sire" winner at the AOBA National Show. Royal Fawn is also the sire of Dom Lucilio, a legendary male known as "the herd sire of champions" with more than 75 champion and blue ribbon offspring.

2006 is just around the corner and more than one pundit is asking if we will breach the £1million barrier in the New Year...Happy Holidays from the New World.

Adrian Stewart