

Keeping Alpacas with Other Livestock - Yea or Neigh?

by Jill McElderry-Maxwell

As alpacas become more available and affordable, breeders are frequently being asked by potential or new owners if alpacas can be housed and pastured with other livestock. This can be a difficult question to answer if the breeder is not familiar with whatever other animal is in question - and sometimes even if they are. In very general terms, housing or pasturing alpacas with other livestock may

- ▶ *change parasite risks*
- ▶ *increase disease risks*
- ▶ *introduce the possibility of one or more species receiving inappropriate nutrition*
- ▶ *introduce physical risks to one or more species*
- ▶ *increase alpaca stress, particularly if the alpaca is alone*

For these reasons and those specifically outlined below, keeping alpacas in the same fields or paddocks with most other livestock is not generally recommended. It is especially discouraged with novice owners who may not yet know their animals well enough to recognize illness or injury in a timely fashion. Alpacas are very stoic, and will often hide signs of stress or illness until they are extremely ill.

While it is possible to keep alpaca together with other species, it generally does not reduce workload and should only be undertaken by experienced owners familiar with the inherent risks of mixing livestock species. It is important to remember that the potential negatives don't just affect the alpacas - both (or all) species being housed or pastured together may face the consequences detailed above.

The Suri Network has put together this resource guide to the specific pros and cons of keeping alpacas with other common livestock species as a service to our members. This guide is not intended as a substitute for veterinary advice and is intended as a general guideline only, based on generally accepted husbandry practices.



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Alpacas and Poultry

Pros:

- ▶ Poultry eagerly consume flies and their larvae, potentially reducing your herd's fly burden.
- ▶ Some poultry, particularly ducks, eat slugs and snails, potentially reducing your herd's risk of meningeal worm.
- ▶ Poultry rake and scratch over manure piles, potentially reducing parasite burdens if the manure dries out faster.
- ▶ Grass-eating poultry like geese, rotated after alpacas, can consume their parasites without harm to the poultry. Their gastrointestinal parasites in turn are not shared by the alpacas.
- ▶ Poultry rotated after alpacas till and fertilize fields, usually without significant damage.
- ▶ Some poultry, especially guinea fowl, avidly consume ticks.

Cons:

- ▶ While poultry and alpacas do not share coccidia species, poultry may harbor salmonella, campylobacter and E. coli in their GI tracts and deposit these bacteria in their feces.
- ▶ Poultry may roost where they are not wanted and contaminate feed or water with their droppings.
- ▶ Many owners fear that free-ranging poultry may attract predators to their area.



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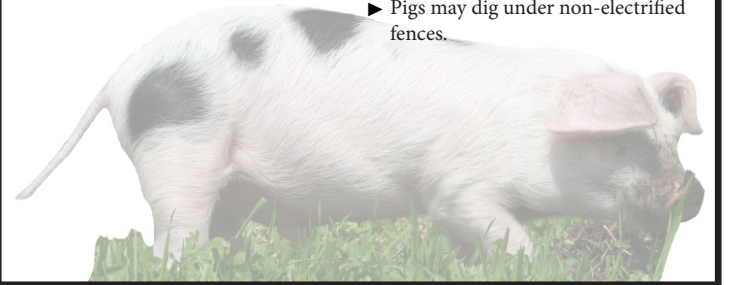
Alpacas and Pigs

Pros:

- ▶ Pigs and alpacas do not share the same gastrointestinal parasites.
- ▶ When pastured in rotation (not sharing the same fields at the same time), pigs and alpacas can reduce the other species' parasite burden.

Cons:

- ▶ Pigs are omnivorous and may attempt to consume young or compromised animals.
- ▶ Full size pigs can easily damage alpacas, intentionally or otherwise.
- ▶ Even heritage, grazing breeds of pigs may do significant damage to fields by rooting.
- ▶ Pigs may dig under non-electrified fences.



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For more information, visit www.surinetwork.org



Alpacas and Equines

Pros:

- ▶ Equines and alpacas do not share significant gastrointestinal parasites.
- ▶ When pastured in rotation (not sharing fields at the same time), horses and alpacas can reduce the other species' parasite burden. Equines may safely eat alpaca parasites, and vice versa.
- ▶ Donkeys may be effective guards for alpacas if kept in a perimeter pasture. Donkeys with good guard instincts will come to regard the interior pastures as "theirs," and will be protective of them. The mere presence of donkeys may be sufficient to deter coyotes.

Cons:

- ▶ Horses can damage or kill alpacas unintentionally. Even miniature horses are proportionately much stronger than alpacas and can kick and bite with devastating consequences.
- ▶ Donkeys may pick up and shake smaller pasture mates, killing or injuring them.
- ▶ Equines may bully alpacas away from common food sources.
- ▶ Alpacas are susceptible to equine herpesvirus 1 (EHV-1), which may be fatal to camelids.
- ▶ Alpacas are also susceptible to *Streptococcus equi* subspecies *zooepidemicus*, which causes "alpaca fever," a rare, but deadly, disease in alpacas. Horses may carry this pathogen without showing any signs of illness.
- ▶ Horses may carry salmonella and shed the bacteria in their manure without showing clinical signs of illness. Alpaca cria in particular are vulnerable to salmonellosis.

Alpacas and Cattle

Pros:

- ▶ None

Cons:

- ▶ Cattle may damage or kill alpacas unintentionally, especially if horned.
- ▶ Cattle and alpacas share many of the same gastrointestinal parasites.
- ▶ Cattle do not use communal dung piles like alpacas, exposing the alpacas to greater parasite risk.
- ▶ Cattle may monopolize common food sources.
- ▶ The typical fencing used for cattle (electric or barbed wire) will not safely contain alpacas, nor keep their potential predators out.
- ▶ Calf starters containing lasalocid or other carboxylic ionophore antibiotics (salinomycin, monensin) are toxic or fatal to camelids.
- ▶ Alpacas are susceptible to bovine viral diarrhea virus (BVDV), which can cause abortion or the creation of persistently infected cria if a pregnant female is exposed.
- ▶ Alpacas are susceptible to Johne's disease, bovine tuberculosis, and potentially other economically significant diseases affecting cattle. Bovine Tb is a significant issue for some parts of Europe.

Alpacas and Sheep

Pros:

- ▶ Alpacas and sheep can usually be contained by the same type of fencing.
- ▶ Alpacas may protect lambs from smaller predators like foxes. However, alpacas are just as vulnerable to dogs and coyotes as the sheep are.

Cons:

- ▶ Sheep and alpacas share the same gastrointestinal parasites.
- ▶ Sheep do not use communal dung piles, exposing the alpacas to greater parasite risk.
- ▶ Alpacas are less copper sensitive than sheep, and alpaca-specific feeds are too high in copper for most breeds of sheep.
- ▶ Many sheep breeds are heavier than alpacas and may bully alpacas from common feed sources.
- ▶ Sheep may injure alpacas by butting; horned sheep are particularly potentially dangerous.
- ▶ Even gelded male alpacas may have the urge to breed female sheep.
- ▶ Adult alpacas can damage young sheep and lambs unintentionally.
- ▶ Caseous lymphadenitis (CL), a fatal disease common in sheep and goats, also affects alpacas.
- ▶ Alpacas are susceptible to Johne's disease, Q fever, soremouth, and other diseases common to sheep.

Alpacas and Goats

Pros:

- ▶ Alpacas and goats can usually be contained by the same type of fencing.
- ▶ Alpacas may protect kids from smaller predators like foxes, although they remain vulnerable to larger predators or groups of predators.
- ▶ Alpacas and goats graze and/or browse on somewhat different plants, making more efficient use of pasture.

Cons:

- ▶ Goats and alpacas share many of the same parasites.
- ▶ Goats do not use communal dung piles, exposing the alpacas to greater parasite risk. Goats will climb into and defecate in hay feeders.
- ▶ Alpacas are copper sensitive; goat feeds and minerals contain levels of copper that may prove toxic to alpacas over time.
- ▶ Goats may bully alpacas from common feed sources.
- ▶ Goats may injure alpacas by butting; horned goats are particularly potentially dangerous.
- ▶ Even gelded male alpacas may attempt to breed female goats.
- ▶ Adult alpacas can inadvertently damage young goats and kids.
- ▶ Alpacas are susceptible to caseous lymphadenitis (CL), a fatal disease commonly found in sheep and goats.
- ▶ Alpacas are susceptible to Johne's disease, soremouth, and other diseases common to goats.