

# Vetting *Long Distance* Buyers

By Nancy Lindemood

Fortunately, the majority of alpaca sales lead to happy sellers, happy buyers, and happy alpacas, but how do you know for certain that will be the case when you are selling to someone you don't know who lives too far away for a personal visit?

If you are out there trying to sell alpacas, you know prospective buyer's knowledge and experience ranges from those new to alpacas to those who already have alpaca herds. In a conversation, you can often assess readiness of the prospective buyer who is new to alpacas. For the prospective buyer that already has alpacas, you may learn they are very experienced, or you might find they are still on the steep part of the learning curve.

Through conversation, you want to confirm your alpacas will be a good fit for the buyer based on their interests, while also ensuring there are no red flags related to the buyer's farming practices, or their physical or financial ability to properly care for the animals. If you are selling pets, or lower priced alpacas, you want to be sure you are not selling to a "flipper" who buys them just to resell them quickly or who may use them for inappropriate purposes. Conversely, buyers who are interested in higher priced seed stock or show alpacas, should not be excluded from vetting. Also beware of scammers who try to take advantage of your need to sell as an opportunity to scam you out of money and use distance to avoid scrutiny.

## My personal approach is:

- Vet all buyers that I do not know well, whether they are new to alpacas, or not.
- Vet all alpaca sales, whether pets, or show, or seed stock.
- A written contract is required for all sales.



## Tools you may consider in your vetting process:

1. Internet Research: There are many potential sources of information about people and businesses on the internet.
  - a. Google search on person's name, farm name, business name
  - b. Alpaca Owners Association
  - c. Suri Network
  - d. Alpaca Affiliate Association in Buyer's state
  - e. Openherd
  - f. Social Media: Facebook, Instagram, Linked In
  - g. Secretary of State website in Buyer's state: Search to verify business name/location, a list of company officials, whether the company is active and good standing. This site will list corporations, LLC's, non-profits.
  - h. Google Maps or USPS to confirm an address.

i. Google Earth is “sometimes” helpful for seeing property layouts including buildings.

2. Talk Live!: Do this as soon as possible after the initial contact is made. If you need to provide some information by email, leave some details for a phone conversation. You can use the phone call to discuss the buyer’s interest in more detail, learn more about them, decide which alpaca(s) might be the best fit, and discuss any questions or concerns that you or the prospective buyer might have. Lack of response to your request to talk via phone or unwillingness to speak with you is a red flag. See Table I for a list of possible questions.

Consider using Zoom or Facetime for your discussion. You can use these tools to show your animals to your buyers and ask the buyer to show you certain aspects of their farm setup. Photos and videos can also work but are easier to fake.

3. Use References. Often you will know someone who knows your prospective buyer, or you can contact a farm in the local affiliate to ask about your buyer. You can also ask a buyer to provide references, such as:

- a. Veterinarian. While vets will not give specifics of any animal issue, you can get a general sense of how they view their client. Vet offices get calls all the time from small animal rescues seeking references on potential adopters, so it is not an uncommon practice.
- b. Farms the buyer has previously purchased alpacas from may be able to provide references for the buyer.

If you are uncomfortable with a buyer after a phone call, most sellers will simply decline the sale. But if you suspect other issues and want to check that out, you might be able to send a Public Records Request to the state organization responsible for investigating livestock cruelty and neglect, e.g., Board of Animal Health or State Veterinarian.

These requests fall under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and apply to any governmental body. Consider calling ahead before you make a request to find out if certain forms are needed or if there are other requirements.

Note: A sampling of states revealed organizations responsible for investigating livestock cruelty and neglect range from centralized in some states to widely dispersed by county in others. A state Board of Animal Health, office of the State Veterinarian or the Department of Agriculture can be good places to start to find out who is responsible and where to find information. State, county, or local humane societies or animal control organizations typically deal only with small animal issues and investigations.

In summary, there are many tools available for vetting a buyer, whether they are local or long distance. Remember, the foundation of an effective vetting process is a discussion with your potential buyer, not an interrogation! A thorough discussion will provide information about the buyer, and it will inform the buyer about you and your alpacas. It can also be educational, while setting up the foundation for sales, successful mentoring relationships and in many cases life-long friendships.

### About the Author:

*Nancy Lindemood is the owner/operator at 2 Point Farm LLC in Dry Ridge, KY, home to approximately 30 Suri Alpacas. She has been raising Suri's since 2013 with a focus on breeding for improved genetics and fiber quality. She previously served as Treasurer of the Suri Network and continues to serve on the Fleece Show Committee. She is also a current member and former Secretary for the Kentucky Alpaca Association.*

