



July 2014 Nunoa Project Veterinary Team in Peru at 14,000 ft.

**In July our veterinary team traveled to Peru to work directly with alpaca farmers** in Nunoa District in the Department of Puno. The team consisted of veterinarians Steve Purdy from the US, Gisela Marcoppido from Argentina, and Jorge Maximiliano from Peru. We were assisted in our field work by veterinary students Megan Parkison and Sarah Leyman from Ohio State, Elissa Mopper from Tufts, Mark Mrzyglocki from Virginia Tech, Nicole Rapa from Purdue, and Paula Melcon from Argentina. Postgraduate prevet student Kayla Harris rounded out the team. Some of the team members had little previous alpaca experience but as has been true on every trip to Peru all pitched in to accomplish the work at hand and became experienced alpaca wranglers and ultrasonographers. It was particularly rewarding to me to see Paula who had never touched an alpaca prior to the trip teach a Peruvian veterinarian who came along with us for our last work day to perform a pregnancy ultrasound exam.



Team members perform pregnancy ultrasounds with shade from a tarp.

We performed pregnancy exams on the herd improvement project animals of farmers who had used our males in this past year's breeding season. We found the same encouraging results with an average of 80% pregnancy rates and some groups achieving 90% rates. All of these animals were pasture bred with one of our machos turned out with 20 to 25 females for 70 to 90 days. This again proves the high fertility of alpacas given enough time and the proper female to male ratio. We visited our breeding males where they are kept in between breeding seasons and found them to be in good condition. Students were trained to evaluate fleece, conformation, teeth, and testes during the exams. We performed pregnancy exams and body condition score evaluations on all of the breeding females and crias we saw at 7 locations. In addition we were asked by two local farmers to evaluate their breeding males and their breeding programs. We saw some very good animals in these two herds but they are not typical of farms in Peru. Pregnancy exams on a portion of the females in one herd revealed a 67% pregnancy rate and we spoke to the farmer about ways to increase that rate. After evaluating the breeding programs in these two herds we made suggestions on how to improve reproduction management to achieve more pregnancies. A consistent feature of the animals we saw in Nunoa District was that body condition scores were consistently lower than on past trips in most locations. The weather this dry season in Peru has been particularly dry thus the grass has not grown well and obviously has low nutritional value. Hay and grain are not available for supplementation. Most crias were in good condition but underconditioned pregnant females may result in problems with low birth weight or weak crias and poor lactations, especially for animals birthing at the end of this year before the more nutritional grass of the rainy season appears.



Team members examine a breeding male

The problems we encountered in Nunoa District are similar to the past and are related to lack of fencing, no animal identification and records, and lack of means to correct these issues. Farmers understand about limiting female to male ratio, and breeding only to top machos but financial and space considerations continue to make these improvements difficult for them. We hope that with the election of new government this September with new officials starting in January 2015 some of these issues will be addressed by local animal health officials. We continue to explore ways to connect Nunoa knitters and weavers with outlets for their products. Since we helped establish contact between them and vendors in Cusco they have established some relationships with sellers there who are purchasing their products. I expect that they will continue to expand that in the future.

**We also explored a new opportunity to help farmers in another location in the Department of Puno.** We are adding this location to our Peruvian animal work to look at helping farmers closer to the Bolivian border centered near the town of Pucara. We feel we have done all we can for the farmers in Nunoa District in Puno, in particular with the limited support from the local government and the consistent problems with communication back from them. Our plan

is to let the Nunoa farmers we have partnered with use our quality breeding males again this next breeding season but we will not have a veterinary team on the ground there in 2015. The males will be collected in April and offered to farmers in the new location near Pucara. The new alpaca herd improvement work is in association with an existing US/Peruvian nonprofit called Chijnaya Foundation. They are well established in the area and have local staff to supervise projects. They have been looking for people with the technical expertise to help farmers in their area. We have that, plus the experience of working with Nunoa farmers for 5 years. We met with their local representatives in July along with members of 3 different communities who have asked for help to improve alpaca production. Chijnaya has people on the ground at all times who can monitor the progress of any projects. They make small loans to farmers requesting help and do not give out money, only materials. Farmers must repay the loans and also use the materials as agreed upon. They have requested help with record keeping, breeding evaluations, fencing, and acquiring better quality males. Some farmers want to get more into Suris as the price of Suri wool is higher in Peru. Also there is interest in establishing colored herds. These are all projects with which we can assist them.. We have also offered to teach local people to perform fecal examinations for gastrointestinal parasites, semen evaluations, connect the farmers with a source of enterotoxemia vaccine to prevent diarrhea deaths in crias, and work to get cria shelters in place to help prevent pneumonia deaths in newborns. Pneumonia seems to be the primary cause of death in crias in the area based on what farmers have told us so far. We are returning with a veterinary team this December to visit those 3 communities and possibly 2 others which have expressed some interest. The timing of our subsequent visits and future work will be decided after that. Our current plan is two visits per year with students and veterinarians as we have done in the past but the exact timing is not decided at present. We are very excited about this future collaboration between the Nunoa Project and CONOPA in Lima, and the Chijnaya Foundation in Pucara.



Weaving and knitting family in Nunoa District

The fall semester is about to start at local western Massachusetts colleges and the **North American Camelid Studies Program is offering two courses for prevet/animal science students.** So far 20 students have signed up for Alpaca and Donkey Reproduction and Camelid Management. These two courses utilize the program's alpaca and donkey herds to teach hands on management, reproduction and problem solving. We will also visit local alpaca farms and shows to get the students a broad exposure to the alpaca industry. Students are responsible for taking care of the animals during the semester. Experienced students help to conduct the research and lecture classes. The students taking these courses and participating in the practical, humane research projects are the ones who will become our future veterinarians and researchers. As in past years educational opportunities for owners, students, and veterinarians are on the horizon for this and next year. Veterinary students and veterinarians from the US and other countries continue to express interest in camelid practice management courses offered each June and in working with us in Peru.



NACSP students discuss semen analyses in the farm teaching lab



NACSP students perform reproductive ultrasounds

Financial support from alpaca owners is what makes all of these projects and opportunities available in the US and South America. Our annual operating budget remains at approximately \$120,000. Thank all of you who have continued or started your support in 2014. Please consider donating more this fall and in the future so that we may continue these important projects. Do not hesitate to contact me at any time regarding anything associated with Nunoa Project or with ideas for the future. If you can think of other fundraising events for us or other people you may know that we should speak to, please let me know.

Thank you,  
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