

Goal of Becoming a llama fleece judge! -

What has worked for me and what would have helped

Judy Ross, Good News Llamas

As I began my journey and evaluated our own herd I soon realized how our llama fleece had improved in the past few years. Education, nutrition and a new focus on breeding has produced a luxurious llama fleece that will become a valuable asset in the fiber market. Hand spinners that have purchased our fleeces comment on how the quality has improved and how much more usable it is for them as they turn their yarns into beautiful handmade items. My love and appreciation of the fleece our llamas give us has given me a desire to be able to encourage others to not only exhibit their fleeces but to learn and experience the joy of being a fiber artist and enjoy beautiful products made from their own llamas.

Judging to me is more than being able to write down a number on a score sheet. I had to understand the fleece from the **“beginning to the end”** to be able to fairly judge. How can I truly know what I am judging if I don't understand the circle of life for this fleece. **To me a fleece is more than the entry in a “clear plastic bag”.**

- As an exhibitor – This allows me to know the amount of work needed to prepare a fleece for exhibition. To understand the proper grooming, shearing and skirting techniques that has been used to prepare this fleece for competition.
- As a hand spinner – To feel the fleece slide through my fingers and imagine the beautiful garments that can be produced.
- My experience with dyeing gives me the understanding of the makeup of the llama's fiber and how it reacts to natural and chemical dyes.
- As I knit, crochet and weave I understand how the yarns or rovings become usable finished products, understanding the concept of blending other fibers to make an even more usable garment. The warmth and weight of the products you produce depending on the types of yarns you use. You don't use the prickly yarns for items that touch your body, silky will not make good socks.
- As a felter to see how beautiful the fibers compress and strengthen
- To know why crimp is important, does guard hair have a use, why is fiber length important?
- Learning why density is so important

I felt in order to be a knowledgeable judge it would take more than just what I had learned at the clinic and apprenticing at shows. **HANDS-ON that's what I needed – to touch and compare!**

- It would have been more beneficial to me if the apprentices could have been broken up into actual shows and workshops that would be taught by fleece instructors or judges.
- The fleece show atmosphere in my opinion does not allow the apprentice hands-on experience needed for judging. The fleece judge has their job to do, time is a factor and at most you get a

“quick” feel of the fleece laying before you. Not a lot of time for questions or comparing.

- I was blessed that a certified fleece instructor allowed me to work with her for an entire day, evaluating all types of fleece, comparing them to each other, comparing family groups, different sexes. I learned more at this hands-on setting than all of my four show apprentices combined. It was a relaxed atmosphere with time to look at the clinic manual while having your questions answered from the instructor. I was able to really put to use what I had learned.

Questions:

- **Prior experience** - If you are not an exhibitor or work with fleece how do you understand the concept of “why process fiber for use”. Should a fleece judge only need to be able to compare the fleeces and arrive at a score? To me there should be more knowledge needed.
- **Honesty and fairness** – setting an allotted number of fleeces needed to complete apprentices has been done in the past, but if the apprentice still does not have the understanding, then don’t send them out to judge. Some may get it in 20 fleeces judged if they work with fleece a lot, others may take 50 fleeces. More focus needs to be on actual fleece evaluations and thinking about the marketability of that fleece.
- **Knowledge of filling out the paper work**, the clinics do not cover this very well
- **VERBAL reasons** – maybe a workshop for this and you could incorporate the paper work
- **Communication** - The judge needs to be able to communicate with the exhibitor in the FLEECE ON CLASSES, taking is needed in this class, as I entered my first walking fleece the judge explained so much to me that it encouraged me to want to learn and enter more.
- **Re-Certify** - At first I did not agree with having to re-certify but I have changed my thoughts on this. As the quality of fleeces change and more options are given, then judges need to know rule changes, fiber types and new uses that have been developed. Maybe a different type of re-Certification clinic, not the standard advanced clinic as has been done in the past.
- **Learning Workshops**, field evaluations, clinics at farms for part of the apprenticeship rather than having to do everything at shows.
- Having a class for fleece show clerks??