

Thursday, September 6, 2012

Livestock Guardian Dog Registry Needed

We live in coyote country and raise sheep. The best ways to protect your sheep from predators is good fences, bringing them in at dark and in my opinion livestock guardian dogs (LGD). However the quality of LGD is really vulnerable in Ontario and probably Canada.

Every summer we all see the same ads: Guardian Dog pups for sale, working lines, \$300 no shots - protect your sheep.

We have bought three pups and been burned thrice. The first dog (and a number of his sibs) have severe skin conditions. He would develop horrendous hot spots within days that cost us a fortune in drugs to partially clear. It was only by putting him on very expensive food, omega 3 and zinc supplements were we able to clear up the problem.

Pup Number 2. Bought without shots because the two tiered pricing was way out of line for the cost of the shots. Vet check by our vet showed a major heart murmur that would probably not resolve with age. The vet's opinion is this would not make a suitable working animal. While the breeder took the pup back, he was planning to rebreed the same pair.

Shame on me for getting burned twice but I thought it would not happen again. Wrong. We went to a "reputable" breeder, paid a lot of money but got a health guarantee. So far so good. After 6 months the pup went lame: diagnosis, severe elbow dysplasia. Contacted the breeder, got a reply saying poor dog, send me the xrays (which had already been sent). Then silence. A few month later, the dog was seriously lame in the back end: diagnosis - bilateral hip dysplasia. Sent the xrays to the breeder. Dead silence. Despite several letters, and the occasional promise to replace the pup by the breeder more than a year has passed and it is obvious this "reputable" breeder has no intention of honouring her guarantee. So after hundreds of dollars of vet bills, I have an expensive dog that is lame, will have a very short life and we will be left with an unprotected flock.

The genetic pool of LGD is probably closer to a genetic puddle. I am guessing that there is severe inbreeding in LGD.

We need a LGD registry in Ontario and probably Canada. We need to know the ancestry of these dogs to prevent inbreeding and as shepherds looking for working animals we need a registry of reputable breeders that will stand behind their dogs. This does not need to be a purebred registry since some crosses will work as well as purebreds. It does need to be a registry of bloodlines, animals need to be tattooed, records need to be kept and health and working status needs to be recorded. Breeders need to be willing to follow a Code of Conduct regarding their breeding practices, offer health guarantees and be willing to remove inferior animals from the breeding population either by culling or neutering.

Our ability to protect our sheep will be impaired unless we have strong, healthy, well bred LGD.

Will well bred dogs cost more? Probably but my vet bills are a whole lot more than the initial cost of a well bred dog.

TTFN,
Laurie