

From haltering and leading, to toenail trimming and shearing, CAMELIDynamics guides alpaca owners to more efficient ways of handling their livestock, resulting in a minimum amount of stress for human and animal alike.

### ■ The Positively Perfect Panel!

**G**et yourself some cows and you had better learn the intricacies of barbed wire and corner bracing, get some horses and get ready to replace boards that are kicked aside or chewed in half... get some fallow deer and get ready to build a 10-foot fence... but get yourself some alpacas and breathe a sigh of relief!

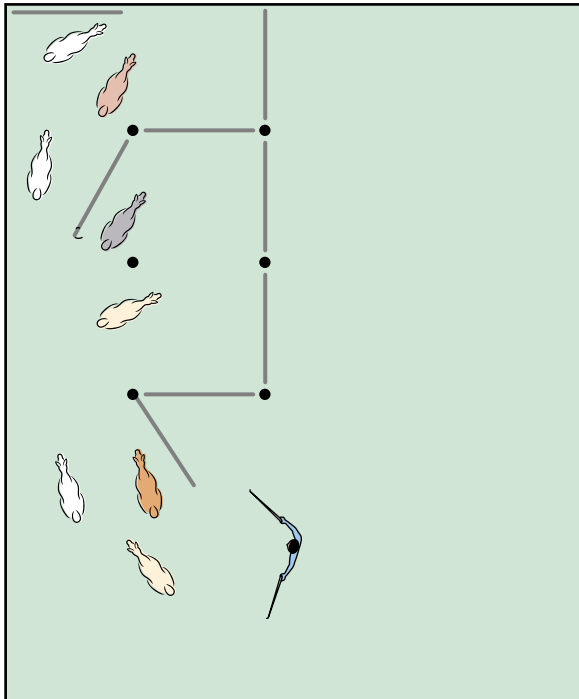
Never pick up a hammer, never dig a posthole and never break a sweat, simply use lightweight panels in various configurations and your handling and training needs are met. We hauled a load of 9' x 5' foot panels back from the AOBA conference last year to add to the 30 that we already have. To be sure, I have a special need for panels for our new Training Center, but I think everyone could benefit

from owning at least 10-15 of these treasures and I wouldn't mind having 20 more. The handling and training applications of sturdy, moveable panels are endless.

#### The Perfect Panel

Stock panels come in different lengths, heights and weights. Panels designed specifically for camelids are fabulous. These are usually 9 feet long and come in different heights. My favorite panel for camelids is 9 feet long and 5 feet high. These lightweight panels are easy to move around, can be hooked together in a series and when you use them to make a pen it is just the right size for training. However, a sizeable or determined alpaca can upend or push over one of





these lighter panels. Thankfully, this is easily remedied. You can secure these panels to an existing anchor: a tree, a sturdy part of the barn, or a T-post pounded a couple of feet into the ground. You can protect the animal from the T-post in a number of different ways. You can slide a PVC pipe 3 inches in diameter right over top of the T-post (*see photo*). Heavy-duty cable ties are usually all that you need to secure the panels to the anchor.

Heavier panels can have their place in your set up, too, and are usually easier to get from your local ranch and feed store. Regardless of how cumbersome these heavier panels are to move around, they can still be moved and that is the secret!

Panels that have square meshing instead of rails are useful for some applications but I don't like them for use in handling situations such as medicating and trimming toenails. An animal could injure his foot or get a leg caught in panels with squares rather than rails. If you are frustrated when your alpaca sticks his head through the rail when you are working with him, you can modify the panel easily. There are several clever plastic fencing products that can be used to close the rail openings. Simply cut the plastic fence to the correct size and attach the plastic mesh to the panel with zip ties (*see photo*).



Ten to fifteen moveable live-stock panels will provide a flexible system of lanes and pens for all your handling needs.



Panels can be secured to an existing barn or fence, or to T-posts. PVC pipe (above) or pipe insulation and tennis balls (left) can be fitted over the T-posts to protect animals from sharp edges.)



Lightweight plastic mesh fencing can be attached to the panels to prevent animals from sticking their heads or legs through.



Herd your alpaca into a 9' x 9' catch pen and approach him from behind his eye, and all your handling tasks will become easier.



If a smaller area is needed, you can move one panel to the middle of the side panels, and secure in place to create a pen half as wide.



**Law of Camelidynamics:**  
If you are having trouble  
with a handling task...  
make your pen smaller!

## The Catch Pen

The most basic use for panels is to create catch pens... wherever you need them! Regardless of how comfortable your alpacas are in your presence, they will usually opt for hanging out in the field rather than playing with you, which means you need to have a system for catching them. Catching the average alpaca will usually require one of the following: an Olympic caliber runner, a dart gun, or some sort of container and a system for herding the alpaca to it. A container that is too big (anything over 12' x 12') means trapping the animal in the corner and using the neck as a means of restraint. I have written reams about why this is not a good idea. Herd your alpaca into a 9 x 9 foot pen, approach him from behind the eye and your job is exponentially easier. You will be able to hear an audible sigh of relief coming from the direction of your alpacas when you consistently use a catch pen.

The beauty of using panels over fixed stalls or pens for catching is their flexibility. If you are having difficulty with a particular technique or animal, **MAKE YOUR TRAINING PEN SMALLER.**

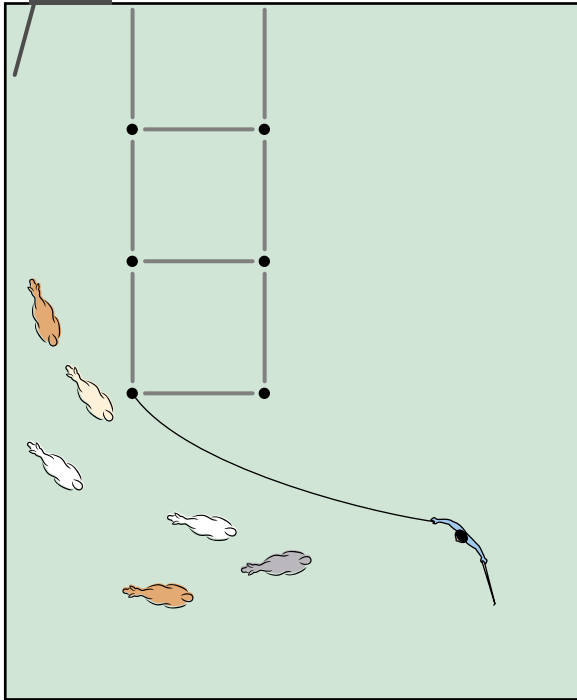
When it comes to animal handling, containment is much easier and safer than restraint. Muscle your alpacas and they will learn to fight you. Reduce the size of the container and you eliminate both momentum and the incentive to escape. With nothing more than some baling twine – or my personal favorite, the alligator clip with nylon attached – you can divide your catch pen in half by moving one of the panels to the middle up-right that divides the panel in half (*see photo*). You end up with a rectangle that is 4.5 feet by 9 feet. This is a great size for working with a couple of weanling alpacas on their first haltering lessons or for giving injections to a small group of alpacas or one llama.

## Handling Facilities

Panels are great for building temporary areas, but you can also use them for setting up a semi-permanent barn layout. Panels offer three major advantages over permanent dividers.

- Flexibility – change your layout when you want or need to
- Ventilation – more airflow in the summer and fewer cold spots in the winter

Trailer



■ Visibility – your barn is more “alpaca friendly,” because the animals much prefer an open floor plan to small boxes.

In addition to separating groups of animals, you can very effectively use panels to create handling facilities in your barn. Panels can be used to create a laneway leading to a scale and then to a small handling area. Create a circular handling system and your job is a lot easier. Alpacas naturally follow other alpacas. Always have an alpaca in front and one behind and the days of pushing and dragging are over. As your herd grows or the composition of your herd changes, it is a simple matter to change the configuration of the panels and the areas they enclose.

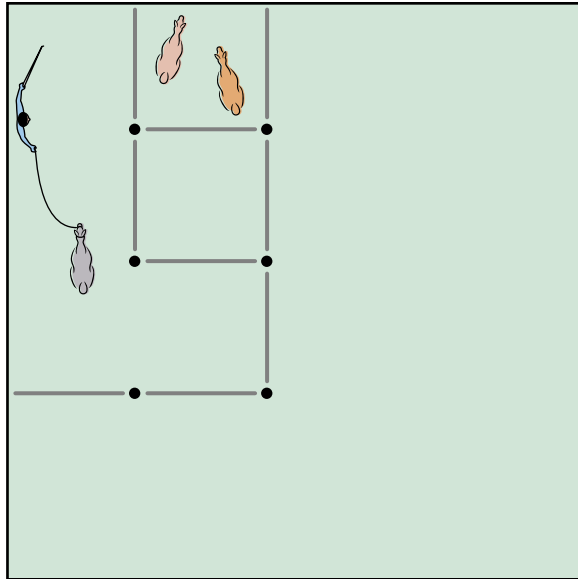
It would be great if all alpacas were born knowing how to lead but they aren't and there are many circumstances under which it is necessary to load and haul an alpaca that doesn't know how to lead. It is a great idea to use panels and incorporate a semi-permanent loading laneway into your barn layout. However, with panels you can also create a loading laneway when you need one. Remember, it is no good to try to herd one alpaca away from the rest. If you are loading an untrained alpaca by herding him into a trailer, always herd a group of alpacas into the trailer, close the door to the trailer, hop inside, and then herd off the ones you don't want. Organize your barn area so that you can leave your trailer parked next to the barn at the end of the



You can arrange panels to funnel your alpacas into a trailer. Herding tape (above), allows a single handler to extend her reach and direct the animals where she wants them.



Arranging panels to create a laneway provides a safe and convenient area to teach alpacas to lead. A buddy or two nearby will make the alpaca student even more comfortable.



loading laneway and you can use your trailer as a handling area, too. A trailer can be a great place to trim toenails or medicate your alpacas.

## Teaching Alpacas to Lead

Teaching an alpaca to lead can be a nightmare without the right set-up. An alpaca that has never experienced being attached to a human will run to the end of the lead and panic when he can't get away. In a large area, there is little or nothing the handler can do to prevent these problematic behaviors. Instead, the handler is forced to hold tight to the rope as the alpaca throws himself wildly around or must let go of the lead rope – neither option is safe or desirable.

Use a long narrow aisle way and an extra-long lead for initial leading and you can simply step in front of the alpaca to stop any end runs. The alpaca can work out that he is attached and can run away inside the laneway. Once your alpaca student is leading well, you can leave the safety of the laneway for a larger area with much less drama. Ten panels make a wonderful “teach to lead” set up. Set up three pens attached to each other 9 feet from a fence line (see photo). A few animals in each pen make the process even easier. By opening the pen at the end, you can create the laneway and a convenient place to turn around.

## Special Situations

Try as we might, we can't see into the future. No matter how many farms you visit or how carefully you plan, your barn set up is going to fall short at some point. I have only one word for you and it is not “plastics” it is panels! With panels you can... create holding areas that can be used for educational events when a number of animals may be visiting, create holding areas for visiting animals, graze animals on a small area of grass that isn't fenced or separate animals physically but not visually.

For example, when a baby is born in nasty weather and you want to keep the dam and new baby with the herd but prevent the baby from wandering away or getting stepped on in a crowded barn, create a small pen for mom and baby in the middle of your loafing area with four panels. Voilá! You have a way of keeping the female with the herd without the baby becoming interested in the barn walls or the

wrong female. This is a much better solution than separating the mother and baby in a separate area such as a stall. Putting new babies in a stall with solid sides will often get them interested in a dark corner. They will waste time trying to nurse in this dark corner instead of looking for mom's "dark corner" (her udder). This happens often enough that these babies are called "wall babies." Panels have no dark corners but still serve the purpose (*see photo*).

Panels can save the day when it comes to shearing. Shearing day is only once a year, so why set up a special area for shearing that won't be used the rest of the year? On the other hand, disorganization on shearing day makes the process harder for the alpacas, the handlers and the shearers. Construct special panel laneways and holding areas especially for shearing and herd the alpacas to the shearer and away from the shearer. Herding means less wasted time – there's no need to handle the alpacas forcefully.

Shipping can certainly up the price of your panels. Here are a couple of suggestions for getting your panels:

- Go in with others in your local area and buy them in bulk and arrange transport in bulk.
- Shop on the Internet or your local farm newspaper for someone who might be selling used panels locally.
- Arrange to buy panels at a show. Often panels are sold at the end of an event.
- Make a trip to buy panels on behalf of a group.
- Talk to llama or alpaca transporters about transporting panels when they have the space.

We all love a win-win outcome. Organization serves many masters – each and every one of your alpacas will settle in and settle down when you use panels and the two-leggeds benefit too! Getting the management job done more easily and efficiently means more time to enjoy your alpacas.

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For over 20 years, Marty McGee Bennett (B.S. Animal Behavior, University of Georgia) has traveled the world teaching camelid enthusiasts how to better understand and more successfully relate to these wonderful animals. The author of three books, including the best-selling *Camelid Companion*, and the star of seven instructional videos, Marty's work has transformed the way owners, breeders, and veterinarians handle and train alpacas. Marty can be reached at [www.camelidynamics.com](http://www.camelidynamics.com) or [marty@camelidynamics.com](mailto:marty@camelidynamics.com).



Panels can be used to separate a mom and new cria, while allowing them to see the rest of the herd, and preventing the baby from seeking out dark corners.

## Suppliers

Following is a list of suppliers for the items described in this article.

### US Fence

(800) 455-5167

[www.us-fence.com/HTML/barrier.html](http://www.us-fence.com/HTML/barrier.html)

Many clever fencing products including plastic fence.

### BuyCableTies.com

[www.buycableties.com](http://www.buycableties.com)

Every kind of cable tie you could possibly need.

### Quality Llama Products

[secure.llamaproducts.com](http://secure.llamaproducts.com)

or 1-800-638-4689.

Panels and other farm/livestock products

### Useful Farm Products

888-771-3276

[usefulfarm.com](http://usefulfarm.com)

Panels and fencing

### Stevens Llama Tique

(507) 376-4230

[www.stevenslimate.com/supplies.htm](http://www.stevenslimate.com/supplies.htm)

Panels and other farm/livestock products

### Useful Llama Items

(800) 635-5262

[www.useful-items.com](http://www.useful-items.com)

Alligator ties and other livestock products

### Zephyr Farm

(800) 570-5262

[zephyrfarm.net](http://zephyrfarm.net)

Specialized training equipment and herding tape