

# NEWS RELEASE

Media Contacts: Diane Norris, 919/513-6241 or [diane\\_norris@ncsu.edu](mailto:diane_norris@ncsu.edu)  
Greg Thomas, News Services, 919/515-3470 or  
[greg\\_thomas@ncsu.edu](mailto:greg_thomas@ncsu.edu)

May 20, 2003

## Move Over, Rover – Llamas are Guarding NC State Sheep

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

When it comes to keeping watch over a flock of sheep and lambs, North Carolina State University's College of Veterinary Medicine has turned to one of the earliest domesticated animals – the llama. A pair of these South American natives now reigns over a three-acre pasture, protecting the sheep and lambs from the attacks of neighborhood dogs.



One of two llamas guards a flock of sheep at NC State's College of Veterinary Medicine

It turns out that llamas are not fond of dogs, and will give chase when canines are spotted. Their size, nearly 6 feet tall and up to 450 pounds, and disposition – they spit when upset – seem well suited to the task of protecting sheep.

“We got them so the students could work with llamas. The hospital was beginning to see clients who had llamas, but there were none at the college for the students to learn about. They immediately became useful protecting the lambs. I was very impressed,” said Diane Norris of the Teaching Animal Unit.

Norris said the college was experiencing nighttime dog attacks, but having some difficulty catching the culprits in the act. “They were killing our lambs and tearing up our adult sheep. It appeared that it was one feral dog who got some house dogs in the neighborhood excited about going after the sheep,” Norris said.

Since the llamas arrived, Norris says there have been no dog attacks, and several of the lambs have become very attached to the pair of llama siblings – Packman and Alfero. If you spook the sheep, several of them will run toward the llamas.

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## Llamas - 2

The 2 year-old males who currently watch over the sheep arrived at the college in 2002. The college got its first pair of llamas in 1992; they were retired from service last year and now live on a retirement farm.

Llamas are herbivores and feed on the same diet as the sheep. The NC State llamas have proven to be very hardy; they've never had any illnesses or needed anything more than routine veterinary care. Norris says the llamas have adapted to our climate. They are given a summer haircut and are provided plenty of shade, but sometimes they enjoy basking in the warm summer sun.

Llamas are members of the camel (camelid) family. They were first domesticated in the highlands of Peru about 5,000 years ago. Primarily pack animals in South America, llamas generally live between 15 and 30 years.

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