



Protecting the flock

Predation accounts for approximately 30 percent of sheep/goat losses in the US. Unfortunately, sheep/goats are susceptible to a variety of wild and domestic predators. While there are numerous strategies for coping with predation, livestock guardians, especially dogs, are one of the most effective and popular methods. In 2019, ~30 percent of US sheep producers used guardian dogs for predator control.

Not just any dog can be a livestock guardian dog (LGD). Some breeds have been specifically bred for this purpose. It is in their genes! Dogs whose instinct is to hunt or herd will not work. Worldwide, there are over 35 livestock guardian dog breeds. Akbash, Anatolian Shepherd, Great Pyrenees, and Maremma are the most popular breeds in the US. The Great Pyrenees is often favored because it is the least aggressive towards people. It is important to match the breed and the dog's behavior to the need of the farm/ranch.

Tips for selecting LGD pups

- From reputable breeders
- Only LGD breeds/crosses
- Good health
- No prey drive
- Calm temperament
- Submissive to livestock
- No roaming behavior
- At least 8 weeks old
- Sex doesn't matter
- Consider fully trained or bonded dogs instead

Livestock guardian dogs protect livestock in several ways:

1) Territorial exclusion. They set up and monitor their territory regularly; 2) Disruption. They disrupt normal predator behavior by being in pastures or on the range with livestock, which is a deterrent; and 3) Direct confrontation. They confront predators in their territory threatening the livestock and chase them away. Problem dogs roam, leave the flock/herd unprotected at dawn and dusk, are overly aggressive towards humans and livestock, and are ineffective at guarding livestock.



Successful livestock guardian dogs are bonded to the livestock. Bonding should start young, between 4 and 16 weeks of age. Small pens (~150 ft²) can be used for the bonding process. Sheep/goats previously socialized to guardian dogs should be used for bonding. After bonding, the puppies can be released into larger pens or small pastures. They should be closely monitored. They need to be taught to respect boundary fences. Bad behaviors need to be corrected immediately. Positive reinforcement is usually more effective than punishment. Young dogs can learn from mature guardians. It is important to socialize pups and teach them basic commands. At the same time, it is important not to make pets out of them. Good nutrition and health care are a must. It may take a couple of years for dogs to become fully effective.

Other Considerations

- GPS tracking
- Liability insurance
- Spay/neuter (?)