

A Helpful Checklist of Things to Think About Before You Add a Karakachan LGD to Your Farm

We have been receiving a lot of calls and questions from around the world from people interested in purchasing a Karakachan LGD. The prime purpose of our breeding of this dog is twofold: 1) we believe the dog to be a benefit to farmers and 2) we want to preserve the breed in its original form. Whether you purchase a Karakachan LGD from Syncope Falls Farm or another source, we want you to enjoy the breed - so here is a checklist to help you think through such a purchase.

Checklist:

Your Farm:

- working farm
- acres for the dog to work and run (they have a lot of energy. The longer they are penned or chained, the more energy they will have to burn, and this can lead to rough housing with the livestock they are supposed to guard – let them run and patrol – that is their job.
- livestock for the dog to guard
- no concrete kennels
- dog is not to be a house pet

The Dog:

- ask for a pedigree or something similar to check for inbreeding. You can check with your vet, but ideally, there should be at least a 3 generation gap between similar ancestors. Every pup in the US should have registration papers of some nature. We register ours with the International Karakachan Dog Association (IKDA) in Bulgaria.
- Ask to see the environment of where the puppy was raised - ideally, puppy should be with mother and some livestock from birth to learn guarding skills
- should have shots up to date and have been on a worming schedule
- ask for name of vet that has given shots, check ups

Dog Development:

- ask about personality of the pup and what livestock it has worked with to date
- ask about family interaction with the pup
- who has worked with it and how much
- ask about what puppy is being fed
- these dogs should not have too much protein as it causes them to grow too fast and become overly active
- They should be on large breed puppy food for at least 12-18 months (through their growth period) and then onto large breed dog food.

What to Expect:

- if this is your first time with a Karakachan LGD, ask if seller will provide assistance by answering questions/giving advice as the pup matures.
- The “puppy stage” can last for up to two years – you’ll need to be a partner in the dog’s development
- The privilege of working with one of the most intelligent and loyal dogs in the country

Frequently Asked Questions about Karakachan Livestock Guardian Dogs (LDGs)

We thought it may be useful to provide a list of Frequently Asked Questions we've received over the past years from people who have bought our pups. We have also been contacted by many people with general questions on the breed and we will update this document to share our response to those as well.

1) What don't we like about this breed?

Frankly, the biggest problem we have about this breed to date is the lack of good breeders in the US. Because of limited blood lines in the US, people have been willing to compromise the Karakachan LGD for a profit. There are good lines in the US, but you need to do your homework.

2) What is the difference between the Karakachan breed and the Bulgarian Shepherd breed?

There is a great deal of confusion around what a Karakachan breed is and what the Bulgarian Shepherd is and often you will see the terms used interchangeably. We have done a lot of research into this question and gained great insight during our meetings with officials of the International Karakachan Dog Association and continued conversations. We were informed there are now definitions to distinguish between the two breeds. The Karakachan dog breed is often used for the creation of new breeds and was used in the origin of the Bulgarian Shepherd dog. In the last 15 years, some breeders in Bulgaria wanted to create a new, big, show breed - the Bulgarian Shepherd dog. You can sometimes also see it called "Karakachan Shepherd Dog" – more confusion! These are cross-breeds of Karakachan dogs with giant breeds such as Caucasian Ovcharka, Central Asian Ovcharka, Moskow watchdog, Saint Bernard, Landseer and Newfoundland. The goal of this breed is to create giant, heavy dogs similar in coloration to the native Karakachan dog. These new dogs are bred mostly as pets and are often used in dog-fighting, which is also called "dog-wrestling" in Central Asia and Russia. At Syncope Falls Farm, we are strictly breeders of the original, native Karakachan dogs. All of our dogs are registered with the International Karakachan Dog Association and have pedigrees to demonstrate their lineage. We do not encourage cross breeding of Karakachan dogs with other breeds due to our goal of preserving this wonderful breed.

3) How big will these dogs get? How long will they work?

Our males on average weigh around 120 pounds, and the females between 100-110 pounds. There are smaller breeding pairs in the US with the females around 90 pounds. An article written in the Sophia Echo on June 12, 2003 quoted Sider and Atila Sedefchev (experts in Bulgaria on preserving the Karakachan dog) as saying that these dogs will reach an impressive average age of 18 to 20 years. When they are 10 to 12, they still work perfectly with the flocks. Some females produce offspring until 15 to 16 years. The article goes on to say that these dogs are large and powerful with harmonious body proportions. The breed is capable of traveling dozens of kilometers without exertion every day and can compete with wolves in speed. They will chase away predators from their territory and are not scared to take on bears and wolves. Literature also states that these dogs are extremely hardy with very little health issues.

4) What type of training do these dogs require?

Luckily for us, most of it is instinct with the Karakachans! But there is no substitute for hands on work with your dog. There is a direct correlation between the time you put into training the dog and what success you and your dog achieve. These dogs want to protect and bond with their flocks and herds. They are not content when they don't have livestock to look over. They need to know the command "No!" to help stop any undesirable activity. There also has to be a working, trusting relationship between you and your Karakachan. Your LGD needs to know that he/she can trust you and vice versa. We have hands on contact with our Karakachans everyday in order to keep that relationship strong. Otherwise, if there is a physical problem with the dog, or it's time to vaccinate/worm, etc. it will turn into an all day rodeo trying to catch your dog. It's also good to leash train your pup starting at around 15 weeks of age. When it comes time to move them from a pasture, they will be very reluctant to leave their territory, and will probably have to be forced to leave – (this is where leash training comes in real handy when you pull the dog through the open gates)

5) How are these dogs with children?

These dogs are very tolerant to children. We became interested in this breed of LGD because of our two small herd hands that work along beside of us in the fields. We have never had any aggressive behavior shown to our children, no matter how rambunctious our boys become. If our kids' behavior becomes too loud and upsetting (fresh air does this to children), the dogs simply round up their goats and move them to a quieter area of the field.

6) How aggressive are the dogs to strangers?

The Karakachans have a warning bark/ howl that will knock your socks off and shake the ground. You immediately know when they are not pleased with a situation. This is usually enough deterrent to send anyone out of the field. If the dogs are still unsure of the stranger, they will round up the herd and move it to a safer location. This was our experience when we had a group of 42 vet students in the field at once! Our dogs have never shown overly aggressive behavior to a person, they have never bitten anyone, but those neighbors that used to cut through the pastures on a daily walk have now changed their routes.

7) How will my new Karakachan pup react to our family dog?

Again, these dogs are highly intelligent. If they are introduced at a young age to the family dog and see you working with this dog, they will come to understand it is not a threat. We have a family dog – a collie - on our farm. The collie may touch noses with the Karakachans through the fence, but knows not to enter their pastures. If we need to move one of the Karakachans through our yard (to haul to the vet for a check up), they understand that the yard is not their territory. They pass by the collie without any disturbance. The Karakachan LGDs display the same behavior in Bulgaria when the flocks are moved throughout the villages.

8) What do I need to do to take care of my dog's coat?

These dogs are shaggy, with coarse and thick fur that protects them from the winter cold and sharp temperature changes. Usually we can find our dogs with frost on their coats in the winter mornings and just loving it! Sometimes they will sleep in the sheds with the goats or sheep, but mostly they stay out in the fields on guard during the night. They shed out this heavy coat in the summer months, so there is no need to shave their fur. But they do enjoy a good combing/brushing. We do recommend Vectra 3-D for your LGD, especially to protect it from tick borne diseases.

9) How do I keep my dog physically sound because I hear this is a concern with large dogs?

Recent studies have shown that good nutrition at the earliest stage is key to keeping large breed dogs healthy. When puppies begin to eat solid food, they should be on large breed puppy food throughout their growing stage (at least 12-18 months) and then transferred to large breed dog food. The large breed food contains glucosamine for healthy joints and lower amounts of protein (so the dogs do not grow faster/heavier than their bones can support). We use Hill's Science Diet for Large Breed puppies. Later, we feed Pedigree Large Breed Dog Food. It should also be taken into consideration that by keeping the dogs trim and not over weight you will greatly reduce their risk of hip dysplasia and stifle(knee) issues.