

Livestock Guardian Dogs are a recent addition to the shepherd's toolkit in the United States. They have long been used as a first line of defense against predators in Europe and Asia, but it was only recently, in the mid 20th century, that they made their way into the US. Their use really did not catch on with American livestock producers until after the Endangered Species Act came into being in the 1970s, making it illegal to kill many of the apex predators that were cutting into American livestock producers' bottom line. Dogs are seen as a 'predator friendly' means of protecting livestock, since the decision to engage with the dog is entirely up to the predator – walking away means the chance to get a meal from an unprotected property nearby, whereas engaging with the dogs lowers the predator's chances of walking away unscathed.

Since the 1970s the US Government and several university systems have undertaken many studies on the effects of using LGD to protect livestock. There is one group in particular that I want to share with the readers here, because it is a good resource for anyone who owns an Anatolian Shepherd, or any other LGD breed, and who wants to learn more about care and handling of working dogs, and it is near and dear to me because it is in my native Texas. That group is the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Livestock Guardian Dog Program.

First, some background. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Livestock Guardian Dog Program (or TAMU LGD to save typing) is situated in San Angelo, Texas, in the heart of sheep and goat country in the state. It is, as indicated by the name of the program, part of the agricultural extension service of Texas A&M University, the state's oldest public university. Texas A&M is home to the state's only DVM program, and has long been the home of serious research geared towards the success of the state's dependence upon agricultural endeavors on all levels. The vet school is the last word in specialist veterinary medicine, and the agricultural extension service is the last word in all things ag related.

The LGD program seeks to educate livestock producers on the advantages and value of incorporating working LGD into their sheep and goat breeding programs. Aside from the inherent difficulties of making a living off of livestock and the land, predators can cause a producer to lose as much as 20% of a lamb or kid crop. Lost animals equals lost money.

The TAMU LGD program started in 2015 with the participation of half a dozen neophyte LGD owning sheep and goat producers, and dogs ranging in age from 6-12 months that were purchased from a working breeder in Billings, MT. The initial year long project was successful enough for the LGD program to continue, and the program website includes case studies of the original participants where they detail, warts and all, their experiences. Mistakes were obviously made in this initial trial, but one of the positive things about the LGD program is that it takes steps to keep others from making the same mistakes – it encourages producers to socialize their dogs and bond them with people, it suggests inventive and effective ways to feed dogs at remote locations on large properties where producers may not see the dogs on a daily basis, methods of tracking dogs in the pasture, and it does all that it can to help people who choose to use working LGD be successful by providing them with best practices to follow.

To this end, the LGD program has frequent, free presentations on topics such as socialization and behavior of the LGD, nutrition, management, introduction of pups to livestock, and ways to create an

environment for the dog to succeed as a working LGD. The program has a presence on Facebook and YouTube where you can find all of their presentations. The people presenting the programs include veterinarians specializing in the behavior of dogs and the human-dog bond, wildlife specialists, and veterinary nutritionists who specialize in feeding canine athletes and working dogs. Sign up and you get a free pass to the Zoom presentation, the chance to type in questions for the presenter to discuss, as well as the aforementioned archive of videos on YouTube and Facebook. You can find the TAMU LGD program website with links to their social media platforms and archived materials here - <https://sanangelo.tamu.edu/research/lgd/>

How does this pertain to Anatolians? Because Anatolians **are** LGD, even those kept as pets with no stock. All breeds are created with a purpose and that purpose shapes the animal in every way – size, coat, color, and most especially, behavior – when we lose sight of the original purpose of our breeds, we lose the breed itself. Working ability is a trait that is selected for just as much as clean movement, a certain head shape, or more profuse coat. We must keep the working traits of the Anatolian Shepherd alive and in the gene pool, and programs that use the power of social media to educate those seeking to use their Anatolians in a working environment – or even those who are simply curious about the breed's original purpose and want to learn more - are going to help us keep our Anatolians working for generations to come.

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