

MAREMMA SHEEPDOG BUYERS' GUIDE

VITAL QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN
INTERVIEWING A MAREMMA BREEDER

KIM CRAWMER, KPA CTP, LFDM



You can't afford an "affordable" LGD.

KIM CRAWMER, KPA CTP, LFDM

INTRODUCTION



You're in the market for a Livestock Guardian Dog and have decided that Maremma Sheepdogs are the best breed for you. You understand that the breeder you buy your puppies from is as important as the breed you choose since poorly bred and improperly socialized puppies can cause more problems than they solve. You want this experience to be a blessing and not a curse. But how do you find the best breeder for your needs? After all, owning an LGD is a new experience for you and a bit overwhelming! Have no fear! I've created this guide just for you!

Here you'll find essential questions you can ask any breeder you are considering buying a puppy from to help you make the best decision possible.

As a farmer who relies on my dogs to keep my livestock safe, I understand the importance of LGDs that are trustworthy and reliable. As a breeder, I know what it takes to produce such dogs. I breed and train the dogs I need, which are precisely the dogs my clients need.

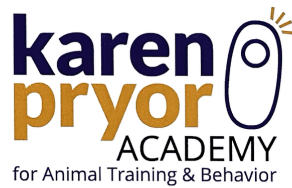


What experience, expertise, and training do you have with the breed? How long have you been breeding Maremmas? How many puppies have you successfully raised and trained to maturity as LGDs?

Everyone has to start somewhere, but it's a simple fact that someone who has only produced one or two litters or who has yet to have produced puppies that are mature adults won't have the same experience level as a more seasoned breeder. Ideally, you want to choose a breeder with fully mature adult litters of 2-3 years old or older in their program. If the only pups they have produced are under this age, it's hard to judge whether their program is working.

However, you need to dig a little deeper into this topic to help you discern if they are the breeder for you. No matter how long they've been breeding, more than simply producing lots of litters is needed. Ask them what percentage of their puppies are in working homes, actively living with livestock.

Certificate of Completion



This is to certify that
Kimberly Crawmer

has completed the

Dog Trainer Professional Program

Supervising Teacher: Terrie Hayward

Awarded this 13th day of April 2024

There are some breeders out there who primarily breed "estate guardians." While this isn't the traditional role of Maremmas, it's how some breeders use their dogs and how they train and socialize their pups. They raise their puppies as companion dogs instead of LGDs, with little or no interaction with livestock and in a setting more suited to pets. If you desire a dog to guard your property and keep predators away, one of these dogs might do ok. But if you need a dog to live with your livestock and be safe and reliable, then one of these breeders is not best for you.

Other questions you can ask are: Have you bred any other breeds? Have you worked in dog-related professions, such as dog grooming or veterinary medicine? Have you taken any professional courses like dog training, behavior, or puppy socialization courses?

Prior experience with dogs and professional education and training shows credibility and reliability. It demonstrates an even deeper level of dedication as a dog professional.

Do you run a working farm or ranch raising one or more livestock species or only have a few pet animals? Or do you even have any livestock at all?



A breeder without livestock should not be breeding working LGDs for many reasons. First, puppies have critical socialization windows in the first weeks and must be exposed to livestock before this window closes.

Also, a breeder needs to be able to support their puppy owners as they raise and train their pups to guard livestock. A breeder can only help people with enough education and experience to draw from.

Everyone has to start somewhere, but the more experience a breeder has as a dog breeder, livestock producer, or in another capacity working with animals in general and dogs in particular (especially Livestock Guardian Dogs), the better.



Do your dogs live with and guard livestock?

This one is crucial. You would be surprised how many people decide to breed Livestock Guardian Dogs but don't use their dogs as Livestock Guardians. This practice has been popular with breeds like Great Pyrenees for years, where they are often bred exclusively for the show or pet market. One of the reasons Maremmas are such great Livestock Guardian Dogs is that they have yet to be overbred for the pet/show market. Therefore they retain more of their working instinct.

However, some breeders are attracted to the "rarity" of the Maremma Sheepdog breed and breed solely for profit and "bragging rights." Sometimes they have a "farm," but it's more of a fancy estate in a "horsey subdivision" than an actual working farm or homestead. At most, they may own a few chickens, horses, or other pet livestock.



Photos of their dogs and puppies with livestock will be very sparse if there are any at all. This lack of photos isn't because they are too busy to take pictures. Their dogs and puppies don't live with the livestock but are pets who spend most of their time lounging around the pool or sleeping on the patio. Their dogs may be beautiful, well-bred, and health tested. They may deter predators by their mere presence, but they aren't Livestock Guardians. They are "Estate Guardians." And if the dogs don't live with the stock, you should ask the breeder two crucial questions:

Why don't their dogs live with the livestock? (Probably because they aren't trustworthy with stock.)

And how can dogs who don't live with livestock train their puppies to be Livestock Guardian Dogs? (They can't.)

And bonus question – if you don't know how to train your adult dogs to live safely with livestock, how can you possibly train your puppies to do so?


Do you have proven, working LGD genetics in your program and a way to track your dogs? Is this information readily accessible to potential buyers?



This is where a website is invaluable in helping potential buyers do their research. Ideally, you will see a page for each breeding dog on the breeder's website, with registered names listed and photos, pedigrees, and health testing information. Then you should see litter pages with the parents listed, links to their pages, and pictures and information on the puppies.

I'd want as much information about the breeder's program as possible. How they socialize and care for their puppies, what kind of livestock their dogs guard, their sales and visitor policies, their training style, information on shipping, testimonials from clients, and more.

And most important of all – you should see lots and lots of photos and videos of the parent dogs and the puppies living with livestock. Everyone has a camera (on their phone) in their pocket these days. A breeder with few pictures of their dogs and puppies with stock is a huge red flag. There's no excuse for any breeder not to have photographic evidence that their dogs and puppies live with livestock unless they don't.








Certificate of Pedigree

Trial mating

Gender: Male
Wright's COI: 0.62%

Breed: Maremma Sheepdog

hed Acres Sevro 19, (W 0.00%) 	Visso del Velino Sirente (W 3.13%)	Scacco Matto Del Velino Sirente (W 0.00%)	Arturo (W 0.00%)	Bastiano (W 0.00%)
		Grezza del Velino Sirente (W 0.00%)	Cane Bianco Tombola (W 0.00%)	Trizia (W 0.00%)
Ausonia Dell'Antico Tratturo (W 0.00%) 	Benson Ranch Pax 17 Nov 2019, (W 0.59%) 	Drago Dell' Antico Tratturo (W 0.00%)	Axante (W 0.00%)	Cane Bianco Terremoto (W 0.00%)
		Forcella (W 0.00%)	Carmela Del Velino Sirente (W 0.00%)	Lara (W 0.00%)
ig Pony Aurae 3, (W 0.05%) 	Sky Island's Gianna 1 Oct 2018, (W 0.00%) 	Stoneybrook's Milan (W 0.00%)	Marso (W 0.00%)	Pastrano (W 0.00%)
		Benson Ranch Cameo (W 0.00%)	Irpina (W 0.00%)	Trizia (W 0.00%)
		Evo (W 0.00%)	Watermark Farm Centurion (W 0.00%)	Zante di Arajani (W 0.00%)
		Silessia's Ballsy (W 0.00%)	Thistlehaven's Liliana (W 0.00%)	Amelia (W 0.00%)
			Stoneybrook's Marco (W 0.00%)	Cerbero (W 0.00%)
			Stoneybrook's Alishe (W 0.00%)	Girella (W 0.00%)
			Watermark Farm Apollo (W 0.00%)	Ulisse di Lucus Angitia (W 0.00%)
			Watermark Farm Arya (W 0.00%)	Osca dei Giunoni (W 0.00%)
			Francesco Del Montelarco (W 0.00%)	
			Stella (W 0.00%)	
			Ciccio (W 0.00%)	
			Furia (W 0.00%)	
			Turco Dei Giunoni (W 0.00%)	
			Tempesta (W 0.00%)	
			Bruno (W 0.00%)	
			Morra (W 0.00%)	
			Pastoretransumantteettaro (W 0.00%)	
			Donnadalliatransumante (W 0.00%)	

I certify that this Pedigree Certificate is correct to the best of my knowledge

Signature: _____

Generated by DogBreederPro.

You may be new to all this, and it may be overwhelming, but having the information readily available on a website is much better than getting a disorganized breeder to text or email all of this information to you. A conscientious breeder will happily answer your questions and share whatever information you need to decide whether their breeding program is for you.

If they don't have a website, they should promptly provide the information and documents you need. If the breeder is reluctant to answer questions or if getting documents like pedigrees and health test results is difficult, then they are probably not trustworthy.

Do you provide any Health Testing for your breeding dogs? If so, where can I see the results of these tests?

AIS PennHIP
(877) 727-6800 www.antechimagingservices.com *For best printing results please use Chrome or IE. Owner's Copy

PennHIP Report

Referring Veterinarian: Dr Kayla McCrone Email: valleyvetservices@gmail.com	Clinic Name: Valley Veterinary Services Lemoore Clinic Address: 7374 20 1/2 Avenue Lemoore, CA 93245 Phone: Fax:
--	---

Patient Information

Client: Crammer, Kim Patient Name: Nova Reg. Name: PennHIP Num: 216525 Species: Canine Date of Birth: 09 Feb 2022 Sex: Female Date of Study: 19 May 2025 Date of Report: 23 May 2025	Tattoo Num: Patient ID: 5257 Registration Num: Microchip Num: Breed: MAREMMA SHEEPDOG Age: 39 months Weight: 79.6 lbs/36.1 kgs Date Submitted: 19 May 2025
--	---

Findings

Distraction Index (DI): Right DI = 0.27, Left DI = 0.22.
Osteoarthritis (OA): **No radiographic evidence of OA for either hip.**
Cavitation/Other Findings: No cavitation present.

Interpretation

Distraction Index (DI): The laxity ranking is based on the hip with the greater laxity (larger DI). In this case the DI used is 0.27.
OA Risk Category: The DI is less than or equal to 0.30. This patient is at minimal risk for hip OA.
Distraction Index Chart:

MAREMMA SHEEPDOG

DI = 0.27

Distraction Index

This one is a major red flag if the answer is no. Genetic defects are devastating in any dog, especially in working Livestock Guardian Dogs. Without a doubt, the most common and most problematic is Hip Dysplasia.

Maremmas are considered a giant breed, and giant breeds are more at risk for hip and elbow dysplasia because of their size and rapid growth rate. Livestock Guardian Dogs are hardworking dogs who often patrol rough terrain and must be ready to act immediately. A dog suffering from arthritis caused by Hip Dysplasia can't effectively do their jobs. This condition causes debilitating pain for the dog and puts the livestock at risk.

Many factors contribute to Hip Dysplasia, including diet and exercise while the puppy grows. Still, the first and most crucial step in minimizing risk is screening breeding dogs through either PennHip or OFA scans and only breeding dogs with passing scores.. If you know more about the other dogs in the pedigree or related dogs and they score well overall, that's even better. Knowledge is power, truly.

What's not ok is a breeder not testing their breeding dogs and simply telling you their dogs "have good hips." You can only know for sure with the proper diagnostic tests, and if a breeder tells you this, they are lying. Most likely, they have bad hips in their line and don't want to admit it, or they don't want to spend the money and care more about profits than breeding healthy dogs.

You may think you can save money by buying these cheaper dogs, but it could be costly in the long run. The costs of vet bills, pain medications, and expensive surgeries will far outweigh any savings you may have made on buying an "affordable puppy." Your dog could become so debilitated that it can't work, necessitating the purchase of a replacement dog or putting your livestock at risk. And sadly, some dogs are so crippled by this horrible condition that they must be put down, which is a heartbreaking and devastating experience.

Do you want to be the one to watch your puppy suffer in pain from crippling arthritis before she's even grown? Do you want to have to put that poor, sweet dog down to spare her a lifetime of agony? It happens more than you think because greedy, unethical breeders value profits over what's best for the dogs, their potential owners, and the breed as a whole. So do yourself a favor and don't buy potential heartache. And do the right thing for the breed and everyone else who loves and depends on these dogs by not enabling these disreputable breeders.

Hip and elbow dysplasia are complicated diseases and testing alone won't prevent the disease from occurring in puppies, but buying a puppy from untested breeding dogs is gambling with your money and your livestock's safety.



Other health tests help make breeding decisions, such as DNA screenings. A breeder who does these tests is a bonus but beware of a sneaky trend. Many breeders do only DNA testing but no screening for Hip or Elbow Dysplasia whatsoever. The reason for this is pure deception. A DNA test is under \$200, and it takes a minute to swab the dog's cheek. Screening for Hip and Elbow Dysplasia, through OFA or PennHip, costs on average \$800-1500 and requires a trip to the vet (sometimes a specialist).

Disreputable breeders will do the DNA test and advertise their dogs as "health tested" when they have not tested for the most critical condition a Livestock Guardian Dog is at risk for and the one most likely to affect its ability to do its job. I would not trust such a shady breeder who would use this premeditated and shameful deception.

Do you socialize your puppies with livestock from a very early age?



I have entire blog posts written about this topic, which I feel very strongly about. I won't go in-depth about the subject, other than to say if the breeder doesn't have their puppies near livestock by at least three weeks (preferably sooner) and living full time with at least a few gentle goats or sheep and maybe some chickens by a minimum of 5 weeks old then that puppy will never live up to their full potential as Livestock Guardian Dogs.

Puppies have critical socialization periods in the first weeks. They must encounter what you want them to be comfortable with to get the most benefit from these periods. And for Livestock Guardian Dogs, socialization with livestock during this time is crucial. If puppies are deprived of livestock past about eight weeks of age, they will be adversely affected for life. They will never live up to their full potential, and training them will be much harder for their new owner, if not impossible.

What is your socialization and training program for the puppies beyond livestock training?

Socialization with livestock is only part of what is needed to turn puppies into successful, well-rounded LGDs.[Puppies also need positive interactions with humans, including children, during their early weeks and exposure to various sights, sounds, and experiences. Puppies deprived of these experiences can become fearful or even aggressive dogs that are difficult to manage and dangerous to handle.

Likewise, puppies should be trained with only positive and humane training methods. In their position statement on humane dog training, The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) states *"Evidence supports the use of reward-based methods for all canine training. AVSAB promotes interactions with animals based on compassion, respect, and scientific evidence. Based on these factors, reward-based learning offers the most advantages and least harm to the learner's welfare. Research supports the efficacy of reward-based training to address unwanted and challenging behaviors. There is no evidence that aversive training is necessary for dog training or behavior modification."*

Breeders who rely on force, punishment, and control to manage their puppies or who advocate that their puppy owners do so could be causing irreparable harm to the dogs. Experts agree, and science has proven that dogs learn best through positive reinforcement. Aversive training methods reduce learning and can adversely affect the dog's trust in humans.



***"Evidence supports the use of reward-based methods for all canine training.
~AVSAB***

Do you offer a 2-year health guarantee?



Hand in hand with health testing, a sign of a reputable breeder is a Health Guarantee, preferably covering the first two years of the puppy's life. Shockingly, the MSCA Code of Ethics doesn't require breeders to provide a Health Guarantee.

I know people who bought dogs from breeders who don't offer a health guarantee. Sadly many of these pups were diagnosed with devastating conditions such as severe Hip Dysplasia at an early age, even under a year old. When the owners returned to these breeders seeking help, the breeders accused the owners of causing the problem (despite veterinary evidence) and refused to give any compensation. The buyers had no recourse. They were left with a debilitated dog in constant pain that couldn't do their jobs and ongoing vet bills. And no protection for their stock.

Of course, by the time the problem was discovered, they loved their dogs too much to give them up, so they had to purchase another dog to guard their livestock while also paying expensive vet bills to try to help the dog, who is now a companion dog. So much for saving money on "affordable" puppies. The price of an "affordable" dog is very high, indeed.

Do you offer a puppy contract?



A contract protects both the buyer and the breeder, and most of all, the puppy. All reputable breeders should provide a written contract with clearly laid out terms. The breeder and the buyer should sign the contract before the puppy goes to its new home.

The Code of Ethics has no contract standard, and non-COE breeders aren't even required to use a contract. Ideally, the breeder has a sample of their contract posted on their website so that the buyer can read it before reserving their puppy. Then the agreement is updated with all the puppy and buyer's info before signing.

Based on the dogs I bought from other breeders, I have seen everything from over-the-top ridiculous contracts with threats and "thou shall not"s to equally ridiculously vague and incoherent ones. I try hard to make my contract fair and straightforward, protecting the buyer, myself as a breeder, and the puppy. I regularly evaluate my contract and rewrite it if I need to. My contract can be viewed on my website.



Do you provide lifetime support for the puppy and their owner?

The breeder should always be the first source of advice and encouragement for any puppy owner, particularly concerning training and management. Sadly many breeders give little to no support to their customers once the puppy leaves their possession. This forces puppy owners to seek other sources for advice. There are few good books or other reliable sources of information on managing and training LGDs, so puppy owners often turn to social media for help. Most of these groups are full of misinformation and very harmful recommendations given by people without real training or experience. These groups can cause more harm than good for the puppy and the owner and waste time. It would be better to buy a puppy from a breeder who is willing and able to help their clients than to end up having to figure it out as you go.



Do you offer a lifetime return policy on your puppies?

Life doesn't always go as planned. Farms are sold, divorce and deaths happen, and circumstances change. Sadly not everyone can keep their dogs forever, even if they want to. It's stressful enough to deal with a challenging situation without worrying about what will happen to the dog.

An unethical breeder refuses to help their puppies or owners. They would prefer those dogs end up in a rescue situation than step in and help. Profits and convenience drive them. Taking back dogs is neither profitable nor convenient.

Ethical breeders believe they are responsible for the dogs they bring into this world for life. They support their puppies and owners, even if some dogs need to return to them. If a breeder isn't willing to provide that commitment, they should not be breeding dogs.

**So what will you do?
What kind of breeder
will you choose to
buy from?**



You can save money and buy an "affordable puppy" from a breeder who cuts corners in the name of profits and quick sales. If you're lucky, things might work out ok. Or there could be lasting repercussions. Only time will tell.

Or you can invest in a puppy from a breeder who checks all the boxes in this guide on what to look for in an ethical, responsible, reliable breeder. You can put your trust in a breeder who puts all their resources, time, and money into their breeding program, puppies, and customers. You can select a breeder that will support you and your dog before the sale, after you bring your puppy home, and for the dog's entire life. The choice is yours.

Kim Crawmer, KPA CTP, LFDM
Prancing Pony Farm
prancingponymaremmas.com