

# LLAMAGATE

## QUICK STATS

- ✘ **CONFERENCE:** Regulation
- ✘ **TEAM:** Department of Agriculture
- **FUMBLE:** Inflexible regulations threaten therapy llamas and common sense
- **HOW TO RECOVER THE BALL:** The federal government should stop engaging in permitting processes that are the responsibilities of state and local officials



*Photo: Bryan Berky*

In February 2015 two llamas quickly became an Internet sensation when they escaped from their farm in Phoenix, AZ. Soon after the llamas escaped, people around the country tracked their movements via social media until they were safely returned home.

Nine years before they had their 15 minutes of fame on cable news networks, the owners, Bub Bullis and Karen Freund, started raising llamas to use as therapy animals for the elderly and for educational purposes. Shortly after the February incident, USDA officials contacted the owners to inform them they needed a license to “showcase” their llamas, even if people only took a few pictures with the llamas.<sup>69</sup>

[For more information, please visit:](#)

[The Guardian: USDA herding internet’s celebrity llamas out of the spotlight, owners say](#)  
[USDA: Regulated Businesses \(Licensing and Registration\)](#)

The owners repeatedly called USDA to try to follow up on the matter but were informed the agency only responds to written inquiries. Eventually the owners stopped showcasing their llamas to avoid the risk of facing fines. As a result, Ms. Freund said, “They [USDA] just totally destroyed everything I had planned for my retirement.”<sup>70</sup> Citizens who reach out to their government for help should receive that help and not a cold shoulder.

## RECOVERY

Why does a llama need permission from someone in Washington, DC, to smile for a camera? State and local permits should suffice. Americans want safe schools for children and clean retirement facilities for the elderly. What Americans do not want is an inflexible and distant permitting process. When a citizen calls a federal agency for assistance, the citizen should never be told the federal agency cannot help him or her unless the problem is submitted in writing. Americans do not work for the federal government; the federal government works for Americans. Obtaining a livestock permit should not be more complicated than capturing a llama on the loose, and it should not be the business of the federal government.