



AUSTRALIAN ALPACA

An Introduction To Alpacas



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Australian Alpaca - An Introduction To Alpacas is published by the Australian Alpaca Association Ltd.
ABN 30 067 146 481
ACN 067 146 481

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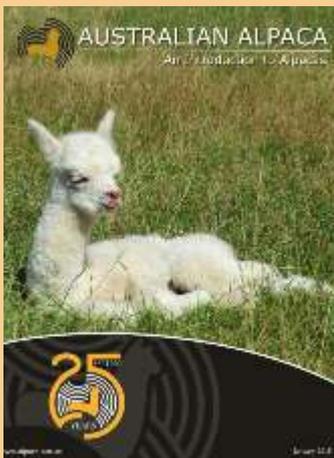
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ISSN 1328-8318



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Cover: New Born Cria Snoozing
Photo by Julie McClen - Oak Grove Ultrafine Alpacas NSW

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President's Message

Thank you for reading Australian Alpaca. This publication provides an introduction to the Australian alpaca industry and the activities of the Australian Alpaca Association (AAA). In 2015 the Australian Alpaca Association celebrates 25 years since its formation in 1990, as the peak industry body supporting members across Australia and internationally through promotion of the alpaca industry, liaison with government and international partners, and through the provision of an animal registry service (the International Alpaca Registry) that contains comprehensive data of over 160,000 animals and their lineage. Since their importation in 1989 the industry has grown and developed into a viable and sustainable primary industry.

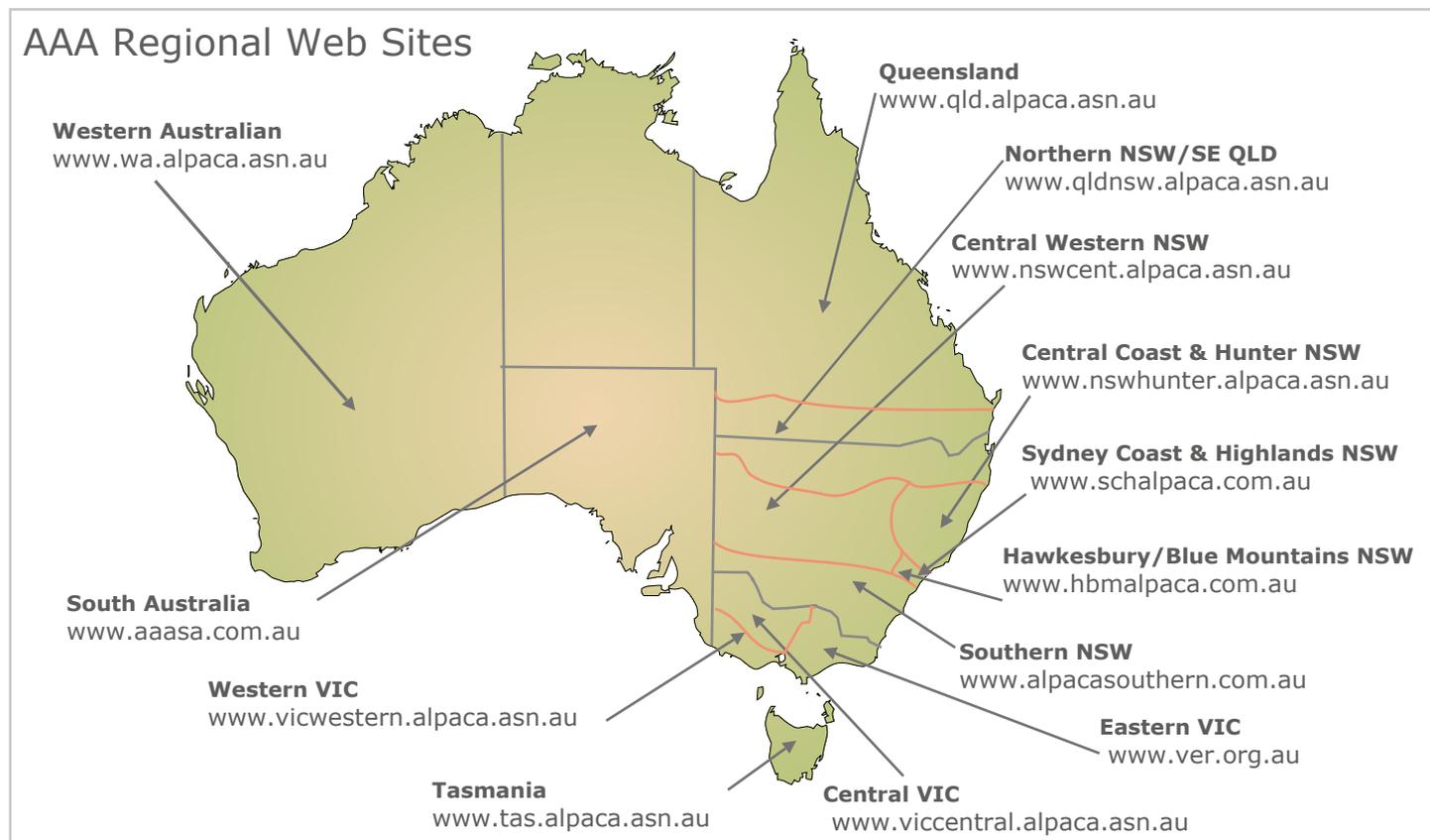


Business opportunities include provision of animals and stud services, with Australian-bred alpacas recognised as being among the best in the world. Our genetics have been exported to New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Europe, South Africa and the Americas. In 2014 new markets opened in Turkey and China, an exciting development, with both countries having strong fibre processing and manufacturing industries. There continues to be strong interest for both animals and alpaca fleece, which can be processed into a wide range of products, including garments, homewares and even luxury carpet, and regardless of herd size there are a range of options available for the sale or processing of fleece. Meat and hides are an emerging and growing market providing producers with an additional income stream and improving the viability of the industry.

Ownership of alpacas is a rewarding and enjoyable experience. Alpacas are easy on the environment and relatively easy to breed and manage. Membership of the AAA is open to all and provides various benefits, development opportunities and the security of animal registration on the International Alpaca Registry. Members contribute to industry development via marketing initiatives, a range of research activities and herd health programs. Various membership options are available, including overseas and educational memberships.

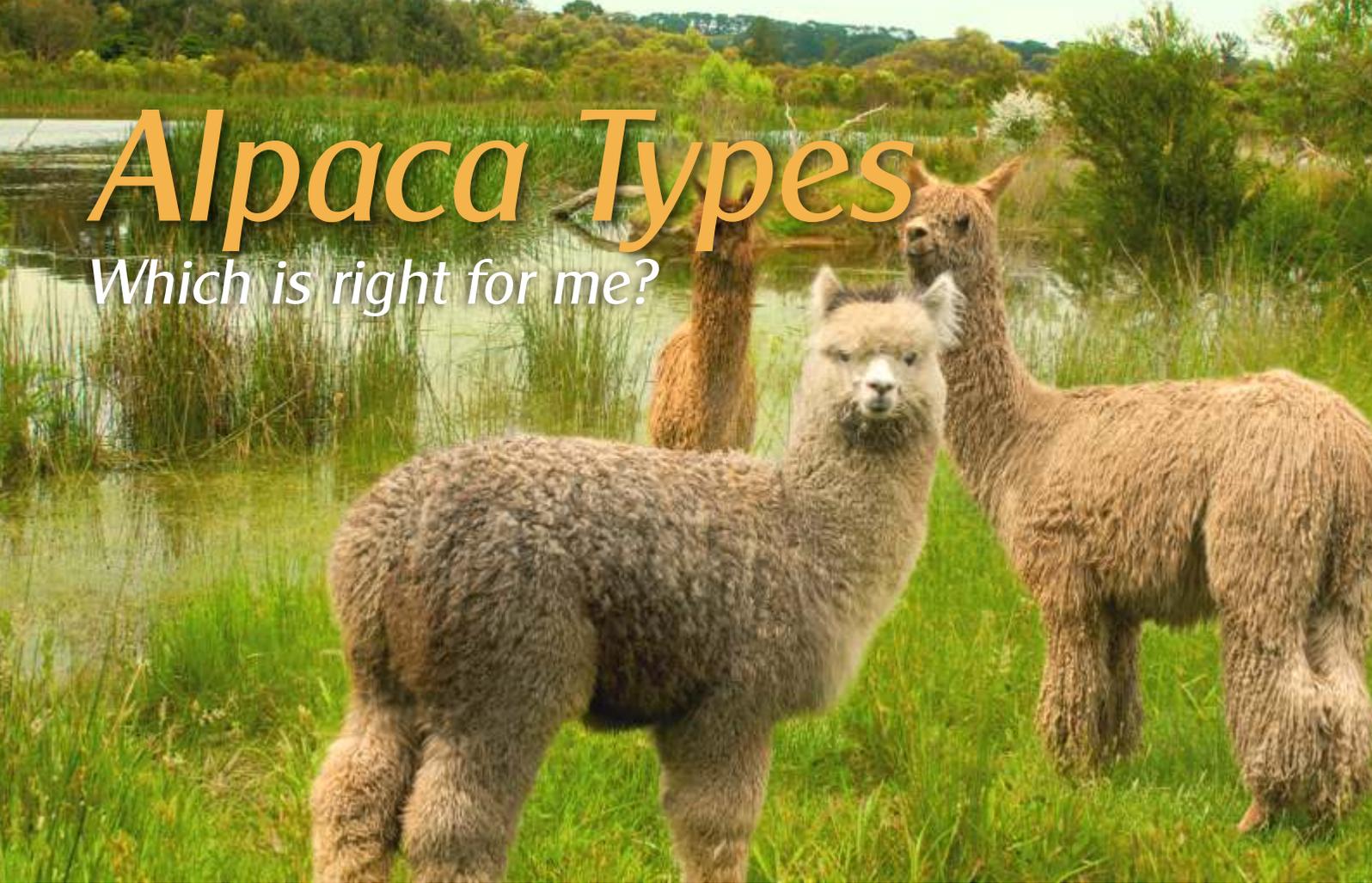
I hope you enjoy reading this edition of Australian Alpaca, and if you are interested in joining the AAA, or would like more information about the Australian alpaca industry, please visit our website at www.alpaca.asn.au or call our national office on (03) 9873 7700.

Michelle Malt
AAA Ltd President



Alpaca Types

Which is right for me?



Introduction

The "ideal" alpaca has a squared-off appearance with four straight, strong legs. It is a well-balanced animal with the neck being two-thirds of the length of the back and the legs matching the length of the neck. It carries its head high when alert and is strong boned and vigorous.

Alpaca fleece comes in varying shades of colour from white to black. In between there are shades of fawn, brown, roan and grey. Animals may be solid in colour or be any combination of the above.

Huacaya

Pronounced wua'ki'ya, this is the most common alpaca type in both South America and Australia.

Huacayas have crimped fleece which grows at right angles to the body which gives the animal a rounded appearance. The fleece should be well nourished and exhibit a defined, highly aligned crimp across all fibres with an excellent bundling staple definition. Coverage should extend down the legs and up the neck to a full bonnet on the head with a clean muzzle. The fleece should feel soft and ideally contain minimal guard hair.

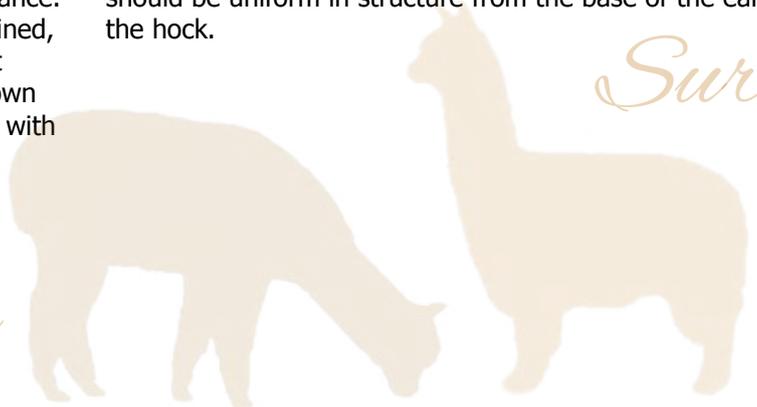
Suri

As a type, the suri (soo'ree) is less common than the huacaya, and in Australia a smaller percentage of alpacas are suris, however, suri numbers are continuing to increase.

This alpaca has fleece with a strongly defined lock, not unlike dreadlocks. The fleece exhibits lustre and has a slippery and silky feel. Locks should be well defined and independent, exhibiting compactness (fullness) of fibre. A lock may be loosely twisted, corkscrewed, curling or flat. Locks can be with or without a wave, but ideally their formation should be apparent close to the skin with a uniform separation or twist that becomes more pronounced towards the tip. The fleece hangs from a centre part – neck through to tail – with the locks lying close to the skin in a draped free-swinging curtain. Locks should be uniform in structure from the base of the ears to the hock.

Huacaya

Suri





Are alpacas related to llamas?

Alpacas are very closely related to llamas. They are both from a group of four species known as South American Camelids. The llama is approximately twice the size of an alpaca with banana shaped ears and is principally used as a pack animal. In Australia alpacas are bred for fleece, and as stud animals, pets and herd guards against foxes; they are unable to withstand an attack by a pack of two or more dogs.

How many alpacas can I run on my property?

That will depend on what sort of pasture and how much pasture your land is capable of producing. Different climatic regions and different soil types vary widely in their carrying capacity.

A standard unit of carrying capacity is the Dry Sheep Equivalent per hectare (DSE). For example, in areas of good soil and high rainfall your property might sustain 10 DSE/ha, compared with dryland areas that might be 1.5 DSE/ha. The DSE for your property can be determined by speaking to an agricultural consultant, or perhaps your neighbour if they are experienced farmers. As a general rule, one alpaca wether is equivalent to one DSE. The nutritional requirements of pregnant alpaca are half as much again as those of a wether. The nutritional requirements of a lactating alpaca are twice as much as a wether. If you are prepared to supplementary feed, you may be able to increase your stocking rate.

What sort of fencing do alpacas need?

Any fencing in broad acreage rural areas that keeps sheep contained is satisfactory, preferably without barbed wire. Alpacas do not tend to jump fences but are quite capable of clearing a standard fence if sufficiently stressed. Electric fencing is not very common but it may be used. Advice on the correct height settings of the hot wires is best sought from an alpaca breeder who has experience with alpacas and electric fencing.

If you live in a well populated area, wandering dogs are an issue - there are always some that are not locked up at night, despite their owner's claims. In these areas, it is essential that the boundary fencing is suitable for keeping dogs out. Dog attacks, in some areas, are becoming an increasingly prevalent problem and when they occur they have disastrous consequences.

What do alpacas eat?

Alpacas are principally grazers but sometimes they enjoy casual browsing. They are fastidious food selectors that are highly adapted to eat small amounts of a variety of plants. Although they can survive very harsh conditions, alpacas do best on good quality pasture and benefit from having access to plant material with long fibres: eg. hay.

There are a number of commercial alpaca mixes available but these are best thought of as supplying vitamins and minerals rather than the bulk feed which is obtained through grazing. One important rule to remember is to introduce any changes to the diet gradually, over a period of a couple of weeks.

This way, the microbes in the gut have time to adjust to any feed changes. Although some people think alpacas don't drink huge amounts, they do need to have ready access to good quality, fresh drinking water.

How often do you shear alpacas?

Alpacas are shorn once a year, usually in spring. Shearing is the biggest maintenance required and usually takes around five to ten minutes per animal for an experienced alpaca shearer.

Depending on the fineness and density of the fleece, alpacas cut on average anywhere between 1 and 4kg of fleece. Some of the high quality stud males will cut higher weights.

What do you do with the fleece?

There are a number of options for alpaca fibre, a list of commercial buyers is available on the AAA website. Marketing opportunities also exist with spinners, felters and textile artists. Some alpaca owners also process their own fibre and value add by processing the fibre into yarns and garments. A few alpaca owners prefer to home spin their fibre. Commercial prices depend on quality with a premium paid for finer micron fibre. Sales to home spinners vary and prices may be higher.

What sort of diseases do alpacas get?

Compared with other livestock, alpacas are relatively disease free. Because of their dry fleece and naturally clean breech, fly strike is not an issue with alpacas. They do not require mulesing or crutching.

They are vaccinated twice yearly with the same '5 in 1' vaccine used for sheep and goats to protect against tetanus, pulpy kidney, black leg, black disease and malignant oedema. When buying alpacas for breeding purposes it is advisable to arrange a veterinary check to ensure you are buying a healthy animal.

Do they make good pets?

Most alpacas make very good pets if they are treated well and the owners are realistic in their expectations. Like any livestock, the more handling they receive as youngsters, the quieter they are as adults. Given time, most alpacas will eat out of your hand and training them to lead by a halter is a straightforward process.

Alpacas spit don't they?

Spitting is perhaps the least endearing feature of alpacas. It is one of the few defence mechanisms an alpaca has and it is quite an effective deterrent.

The material is basically regurgitated or recently chewed grass and it brushes off when dry. It does have a distinctive and somewhat offensive odour and it is best to avoid being a target. However, it is quite rare that alpacas spit at people. It is normally used as a pecking order mechanism with other alpacas. If a human hit occurs, it is usually because the person has not read the signs properly when stepping between two squabbling alpacas.



Can I just have one or do I need to have lots?

It is possible, but not desirable to have a single alpaca, and it is not a pleasant existence for the animal. Alpacas are herd animals and are instinctively gregarious, as are other domestic livestock. They obtain security and contentment from having at least one other alpaca for company. For this reason, it is usually recommended that two alpacas are the desirable minimum. Sometimes if a single pregnant female is bought for breeding, a wether can go with her for company.

How do you transport alpacas?

Alpacas travel very well in a van, covered trailer or horse float. Most alpacas will sit during the journey and travel best in the company of another alpaca. On long trips over two or three hours it is advisable to plan for a stop so the alpacas can have a toilet break. Clean straw on the floor of the vehicle helps to absorb jarring on rough roads.

Can I run alpacas with other livestock?

Alpacas can bond well with other types of animals. Naturally, alpacas and aggressive dogs are not a good combination, but there are many cases of quiet dogs mixing well with alpacas. Individual alpacas have been very successfully run with sheep and goats to act as fox guards. The alpacas tend to bond with the foster herd and they are naturally aggressive towards foxes.

The Emerging Meat & Hide Market

By Ian Frith - Illawarra Prime



The commercial farming of alpaca to now include the meat and hide industry has proven that the industry as a whole is now totally viable and provides the grower with an additional income stream. Not only does it benefit existing growers but opens doors to other farmers looking to support their own industries, e.g. dairy farmers. If this is the case, those farmers will require seed stock to start their herds and this is where the industry as a whole reaps the benefits, by supplying those animals for start up programs. The return on capital investment allows existing growers to move on animals they can no longer use in their herd and in return purchase other genetics through matings or new females to bolster their herds. Previously, apart from genetics sought by breeders to bolster their herds from other breeders, there was no defined market or avenue to move on excess animals, other than as guardian animals or pets on an adhoc basis. In times of drought and downsizing of sheep herds, these markets will see limitations and start to dry up.

There are dangers involved and one of these is sustainability. There is no use commencing a commercial enterprise and after establishing market outlets find out that you cannot supply those customers you have created. Your product will be replaced by an alternative one and you might not get a second chance. For this reason, the herd must be built up knowing that you can maintain supply to the customer base you have created. This can take up to five years, so there is no short term fix and commitment from the grower has to be sound. At present we have rejected export orders to maintain supply to our existing domestic customer base but expect that, with a bit of luck, to change within the next twelve months.

Except for the traditional burgers, sausages and koftas, it is wise not to supply butchers or retail outlets with the prime cuts. If a member of the public buys a prime cut and is not aware of how to prepare and cook that cut, their experience may be less than pleasant and they may be put off for the future. The big market is restaurants, whose chefs want to be different, up market cafes and hotels. Wineries with good restaurants are always looking for food that is different to complement their wines. Upmarket delis love the smoked legs and this has proven very popular. 100% of the animal is used (including offal) from the neck to the shanks. The mince is exceptional due to its low fat content and is used for lasagna and meat balls.

At the end of the 2014 year Illawarra Prime can announce that with our partners WA Pime Alpaca (Kallaroo Park and Bedrock Alpacas) in Western Australia together with Fleurieu Prime Alpaca (Ambersun Alpacas) in South

Australia and with outlets in Qld and Victoria and Tasmania we have exceeded 45 tonnes of alpaca meat sold into the Australian market. The exciting news is that we have recently purchased our own abattoir in NSW that gives us better control over production and allows us to cater for others wishing to enter the industry. The industry for hides is still in its infancy and although we have seen some beautiful leather products made from alpaca hide we have not had the time to venture far into this as yet.

It is proving without a shadow of a doubt that the commercial farming of alpaca to include the meat and hides is totally viable and a stand alone income stream has emerged. Many breeders are now taking the opportunity to sell those wethers that fit our criteria to us and thus freeing up their herd to invest in better breeding stock for the future. Enquiries from existing livestock producers of different species are on the increase now that they recognise there are alternatives out there that can make money/supplement their existing programmes. We now have growers in all states breeding wethers for the business.

The continuation of the PhD study in conjunction with RIRDC and Sydney University into the quality, sustainability and acceptance of alpaca meat is ongoing. This study has 12 months to run and our PhD student Miss Melanie Smith has produced exciting results for the study to date. We should also like to acknowledge the expertise of Dr Jane Vaughan BVSc PhD MACVSC for her assistance with nutrition to obtain the best possible outcomes from our herd which is now approaching some 3000 breeding females.

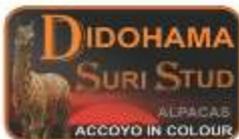
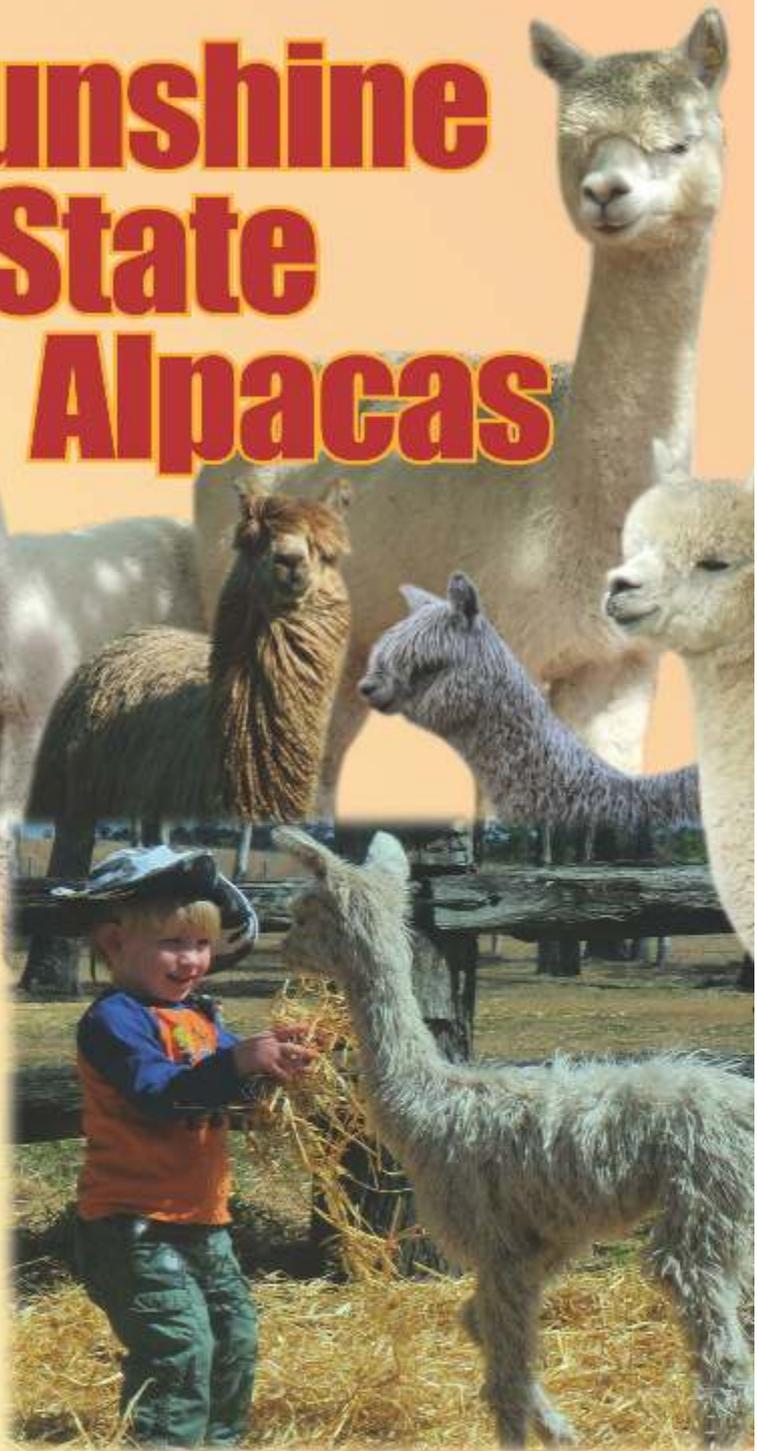
There is still however that danger of sustainability, so it is imperative that we increase our meat breeding herds with good genetics which includes conformation and fleeces so that we can meet demand for fibre production as well as meat production in the coming years. Fibre from our meat producers is also a primary source of income. As stated the industry for meat and hides is still in its infancy, but a gigantic leap of faith has taken place in the past couple of years (but yet again it has taken four years to get to this stage) with acceptance and production exceeding expectations.

Any outsider, including our fellow farmers and graziers, looking into our industry, can now see a strong and viable rural industry, constantly growing and being truly commercial and sustainable. Who knows what we will report to you next year?

Sunshine State Alpacas

Expert advice,
quality animals
and local
knowledge

Sunshine State Alpacas is committed to the success and growth of breeding alpacas in Queensland. We believe encouragement, support and the sharing of knowledge and experience brings success. Visit www.sunshinestatealpacas.com to learn about us and how we can help you achieve your alpaca goals.



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So you want to buy alpacas?

The ownership of alpacas is a fabulous experience as well as having the potential to be financially rewarding if you protect yourself from initial mistakes when you take your first steps in this industry. If you wish to be a serious breeder there are a few very important areas of knowledge to safeguard your investment.

Important guidelines before selecting

- Learn as much as you can about alpaca conformation, fibre and price structure before you select.
- Realise that the duty of a breeder or an agent is to sell you stock. Do not blame them for your lack of knowledge.
- If you are not confident, employ someone reputable to select for you.
- Select with 90% brain and 10% heart!
- You, or a selector, are not veterinarians. If something about an animal bothers you, ask a vet to check it.

What should you expect from the seller?

- Alpacas should be fully vaccinated and drenched with health and veterinary records available.
- Fleece statistics should be available.
- Current feeding regime.
- AAA registration papers should be available for all registered alpacas.
- Pregnant females should have a live cria guarantee.
- Weanlings should have a fertility guarantee.

Publications to help new breeders

- Managing Alpacas in Australia – Available online from AAA.
- Farming Alpacas - Available online from AAA.
- ABC for Alpaca Owners – Available online from Grande Verge & Alpaca Dynamics.

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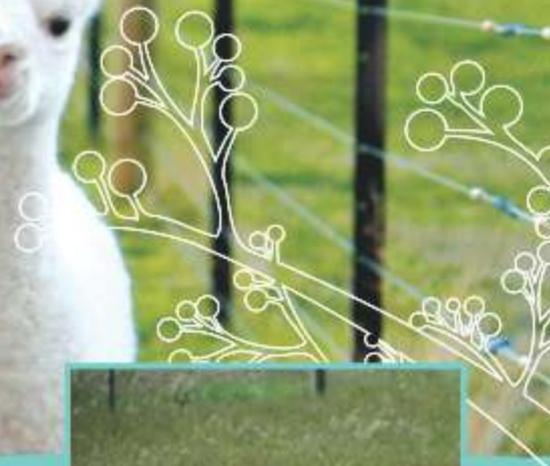
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Ian Frith, Berry NSW - www.millpacas.com



fine fleeced huacayas



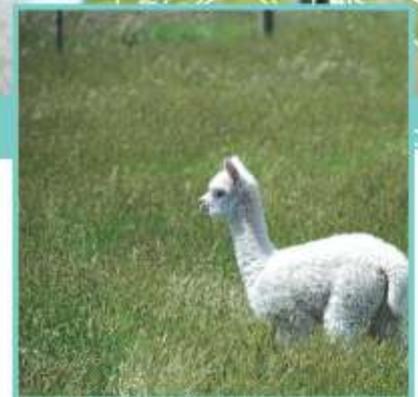
Producing:

- Fine White, Light Fawn and coloured huacayas
- Progeny with consistent inherent traits for fibre and conformation

Breeding since 2009, we have continued to source superior genetics that support our breeding goals. We also focus on staying educated in the latest health information and knowledge that is advancing our industry towards a sustainable future.

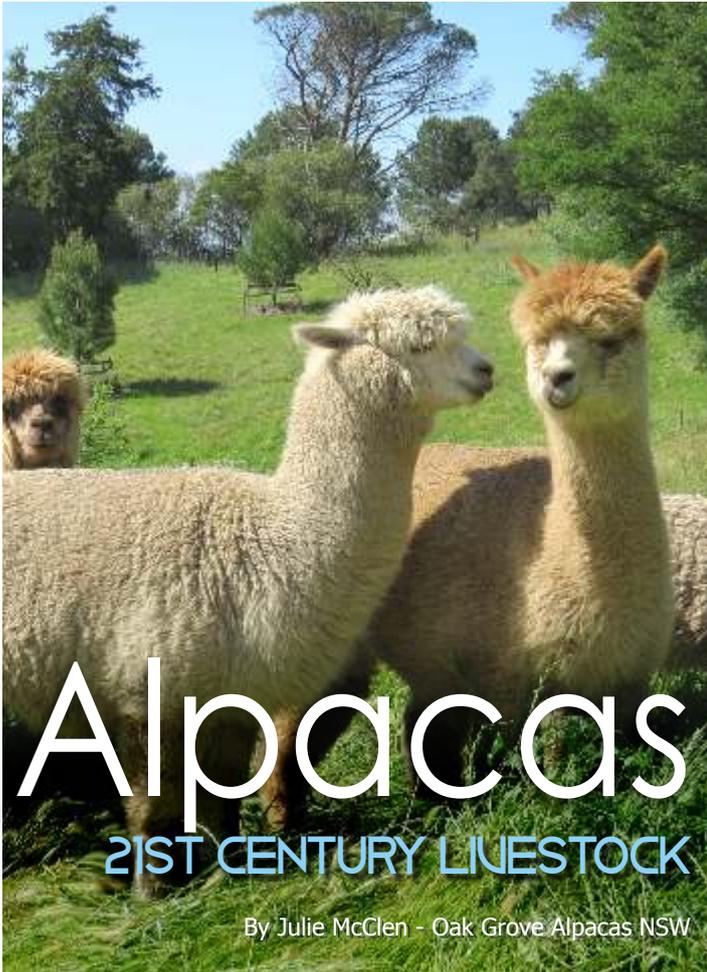
Our elite herd sires:

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- Camelot Lancelot
- Coricancha Guamani
- Windsong Valley Kichirou
- Jolimont Hamal
- Jigarú Renegade



Visit www.ashbournealpacas.com.au for further information





nature to fit perfectly with the greener consciousness of the 21st century.

The eco friendly traits of alpacas are something as an industry we could better use to our advantage, by promoting alpacas as livestock suitable to Australian conditions, and appealing to the environmental groups whose influence is growing stronger each year. They in turn could lend their support to the promotion of alpacas as an environmentally friendly alternative to sheep or goats.

How can anyone fail to be impressed by the alpacas soft padded feet putting less pressure on our fragile soils than other livestock, and even our native animals? At 39 kPA the static load weight of an alpaca is much better than sheep at 82 kPA, cattle at 185 kPA and man at 95 kPA, and even better than our native kangaroo coming in at 46 kPA.

Their soft padded feet do not damage our shallow top soils like other harder hooved livestock and they do not rip out grasses damaging the roots, or ringbark trees, therefore compaction is less, fertility is maintained, less soil erosion occurs and less weed invasion is likely.

Alpacas do well on native grasses and as browsers they tend to select a variety of plants to eat, so biodiversity is maintained and since native pastures require less fertiliser this can in turn reduce waterway contamination from chemical run off.

We live in a world becoming greener by the day, green as it relates to an environmental conscious that is. Most modern consumers have an understanding of the concepts behind environmental sustainability and new catch phrases relating to environmental issues are populating our language at a rapid rate.

Carbon footprint, eco friendly, global warming and sustainable agriculture, are but a few of the newer members of the new dialect of environment, joining those more established terms like recycling and greenies.

Add to this growing environmental consciousness the desire by consumers to consider the welfare of the livestock that provide the raw products of fleece, leather, milk and meat to name but a few, and you have a farming environment like no other in the history of agriculture. With global animal rights groups like PETA drawing attention to the practice of mulesing sheep and battery farming of chickens, severe economic consequences are occurring for farmers unable to adapt. Some countries are now banning imports of animal products whose husbandry involves practices on the blacklist of animal rights organisations worldwide.

But all of these issues are something we look on from a distance as alpaca breeders. We have livestock designed by

The practice of alpacas to have communal dung piles that they tend to not graze around reduces worm burdens and therefore the need for chemical drenches is also reduced, and the ease of manure collection offers the opportunity for another side line to supplement farm income and improve soil fertility naturally.

Due to their clean breach and the lifting of their tail to urinate and defecate, they do not require crutching or mulesing, now a major issue for the sheep industry. They tend not to suffer from fly strike or parasites like other livestock and this also reduces the use of chemicals in the farming process.

Their fibre is produced in a variety of natural colours lending itself perfectly to producing products from undyed fibre, a process which requires environmentally damaging chemicals. The lower grease content in alpaca fibre also requires less chemical use in the scour process further enhancing its ability to appeal to the growing natural and organic markets worldwide.

So when you are next promoting the farming of alpacas, don't forget to mention they were 'green' long before the term was even adopted to represent the environmentally conscious!

There's so much more to know about the Australian alpaca than meets the eye.

We have been at the heart of the Australian alpaca industry from the very beginning, providing the experience and expertise driving the science and evolution of an alpaca perfectly suited to Australian conditions.

From one life spent in the Merino industry, and another spent in science, we bring to the alpaca industry the inspiration for a fleece-perfect Australian alpaca breeding programme.

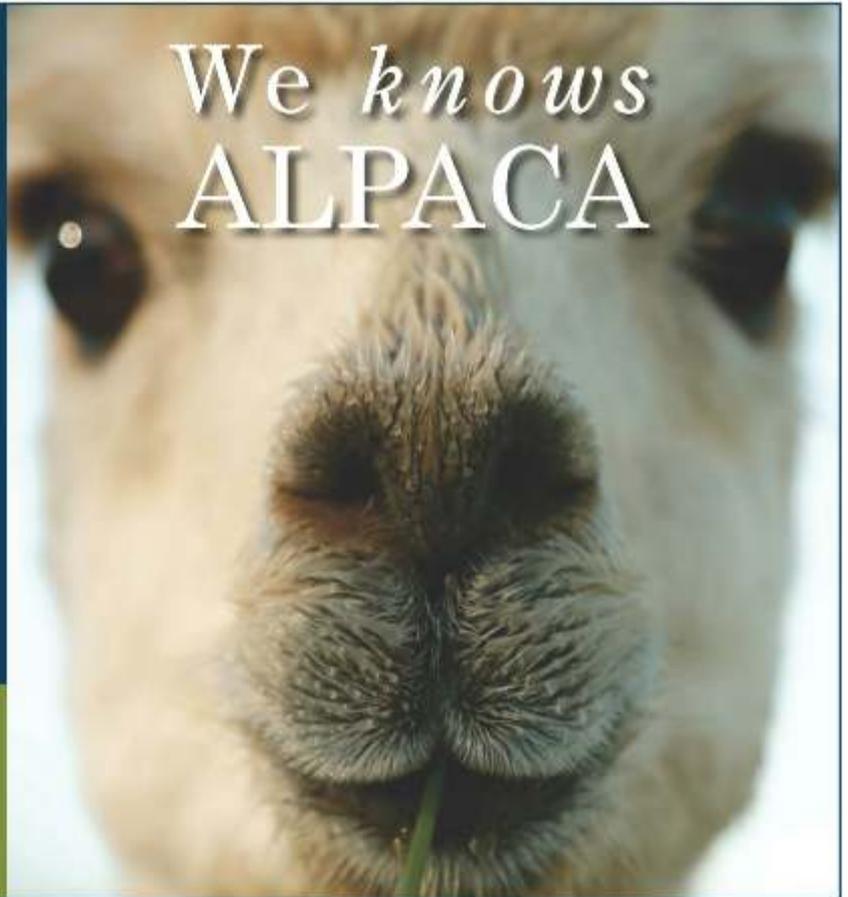
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Workshops for new breeders.

The Program.

Includes classroom and hands-on sessions in the barn, working with alpacas. Learn how to select quality alpacas - recognise good conformation and desirable fleece traits. Understand pedigrees, and fleece reports.

Learn how to trim toe-nails, give vaccinations, drench, body condition scoring, weigh and shear your alpaca. Matings, spit-offs, birthing, new cria care. Train alpacas to walk on a lead.

Discover how to breed to succeed. What animals should I start with? Do I need my own stud male? What facilities will be needed? Farm layout - fencing, laneways, catch pens.

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The individual price is \$425 (\$625 couple). The package includes en-suite accommodation for Saturday night, breakfast, morning teas,

Saturday and Sunday lunch, Saturday night dinner, and workshop materials.

Bookings.

All details and booking forms are at www.flowerdalealpacas.net
Or phone Jen on 03 9728 7070.



We would like to thank everyone that supported the recent auction of our white, fawn & brown alpacas.

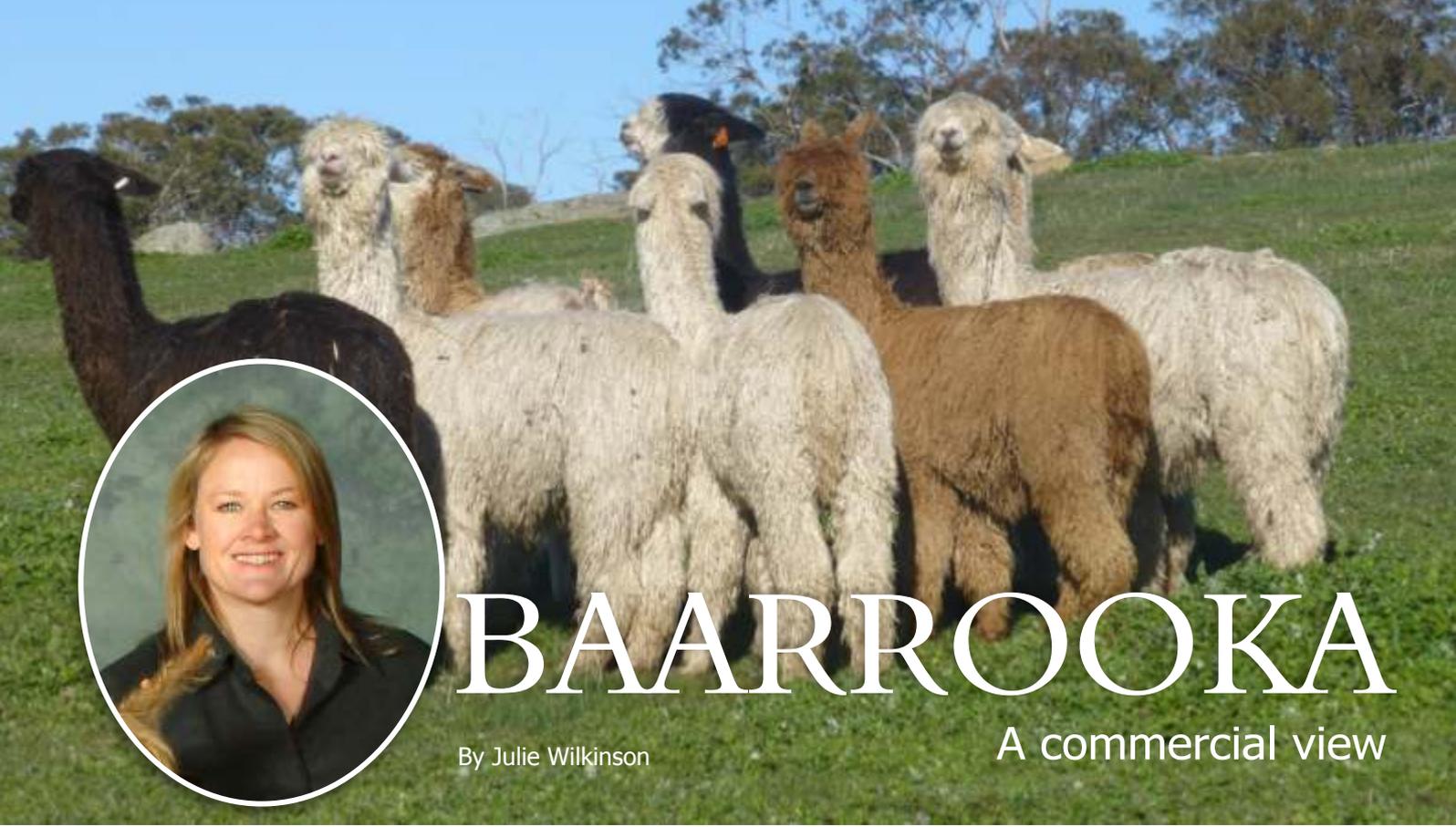
Hopefully we have demonstrated that investing into a high quality breeding program does pay dividends.

We recently purchased the Morning Star grey and black herd to join our elite grey breeding program and would like to thank Royall and Susan Tyler for this opportunity.

Thank you! Dean & Jenny Ford

**VISTA
DEL SUD
ALPACAS**





BAARROOKA

By Julie Wilkinson

A commercial view

Like many people, I came to alpacas from the corporate world – more than 20 years as an environmental consultant based in Melbourne. However, I also have a farming background, having grown up on a dairy farm. With my family still involved in farming, I had to adopt a definitive livestock approach to avoid the yuppie-farmer tag they were keen to give me when I told them I was buying alpacas.

The hook that got me involved with alpacas was the challenge of breeding this unusual animal and the opportunity to be involved in developing a livestock industry from the ground up. However, to be able to run a herd of 650 suris generally on my own, I have to approach the management of the herd in the same way that a sheep or cattle farmer would – making breeding and management decisions to enable the herd to be viable in the longer term. For Baarrooka, this has meant the development of a white commercial fleece herd alongside a colour show/stud herd. It means assessing each animal on its commercial merits, be it for breeding, fleece or meat purposes and ensuring an on going turnover to allow continuous improvement in all of these streams.

I currently run my herd on approximately 200 hilly and largely unimproved acres - in large mobs in large paddocks - and find I have very little parasite, illness or birthing problems as a result. We have sold off our cattle from a further 350 acres to expand my commercial herd. Based on my calculations, I can make more per acre with alpaca than cattle and the environmental benefits to the soil (not to mention fencing and infrastructure) from these lighter and soft-padded stock will enhance the value of the

property itself over time. We have also developed an on-line store (alpacarama.com.au) to sell fibre and handcrafted product from alpacas and promote the fibre and animals at local Farmer's Markets. I am part of a suri fibre development group and have recently travelled to Peru to look at opportunities for collaboration with Peruvian mills for processing suri fibre.

I love the social aspect of showing, and being a competitive person, putting my best breeding stock up against others in the show ring, as validation of my breeding decisions. However, I have a commitment to the alpaca industry in the long term, which will require research and investment in fleece and meat processing to enable the industry to be run on a fully commercial basis in the future.

That's how I approach alpaca farming. However, the best thing about the industry is that there is room for all types of approaches - from breeding for pets, show and stud animals, fibre, meat, or a combination of these. And each is as valid an approach as the next.

The one thing we have in common as alpaca breeders is that we are all entranced by this South American Camelid and love to talk about them to whoever will listen. The show system is grounded on the fact that we love to get together to show off our breeding, check out the competition and socialize with like minded people. In general alpaca breeders are a pretty nice and generous bunch!



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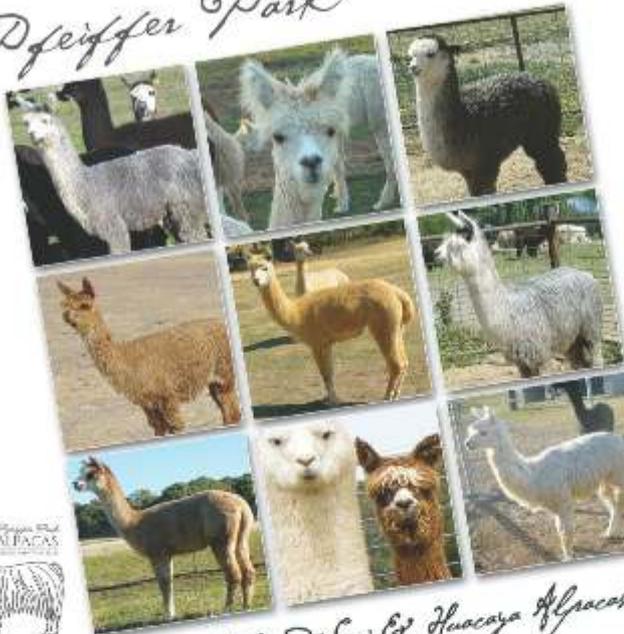


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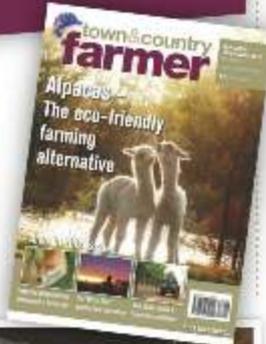
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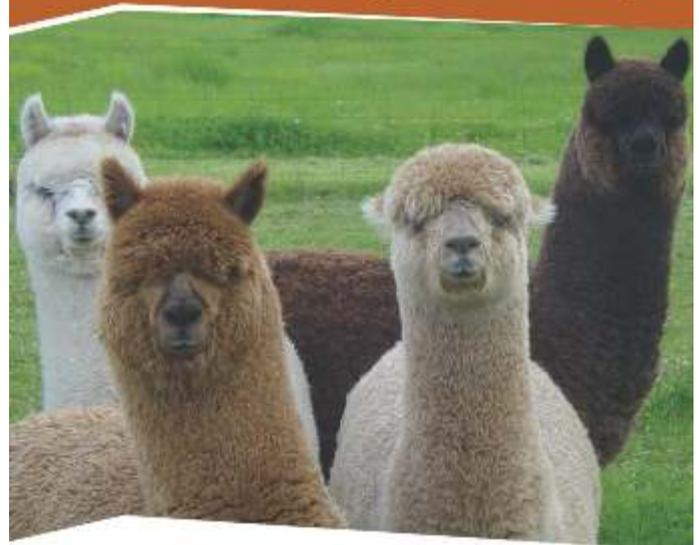
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Felted Bears

By Angela Smith - One Tree Hill Alpaca

As is the case with most alpaca breeders we were looking for ways to use our fleece. At the start of our alpaca journey and being only what some would consider a 'small breeder' we were unsure of what to do with our fleece. We also breed coloured alpacas so on a kilogram and commercial basis our fleece was not very viable. We quickly realised that we needed to value add.

We started attending markets with our handmade products about 3 years ago. The majority of the items that we sell are handmade, with a few commercial products in the mix. Our handmade range includes dog beds, scarves, beanies, cards, owls, fridge magnet, felted soap and hand dyed yarn but I was forever on the search for new and different products to add to our range and thought that felted bears might be fun to make.

Some of the commercial alpaca bears are made from the hides and in addition to this they would have to be imported from overseas. Both are something that we were keen to avoid. We have a wonderful and vibrant alpaca industry here in Australia, so is there really a need to look overseas for products? I have a couple of mantras, one being, we grow the fleece and we should make products from the fleece! There is no need to import products from overseas when we can make them here, so the bear making journey began.

Once I had decided to add felted bears to our range I researched what was currently in the market, to get ideas for what I could make. I was new to felting but I was also very keen to give it a try. It was during this research that I came across another breeder in my region, Jim and Connie Styles, who were dying and felting bears for their online shop. I thought these were really nice and would suit our customers. I started selling their bears on our stall on consignment, just to see if there was a market for them and if our customers were interested. The answer to both questions was 'yes'. So I thought I would give it a go.

I originally purchased the felting needles from overseas but I have found a much better product being sold here in Australia through another alpaca breeder - Petlyn Fibre Products - owned and run by Julie and Joe Hofer. I had some roving produced from our fleece locally at a mini mill and was using this to felt the bears however I now wash, dry and comb my own fleece using the combs that I purchased from Julie and Joe. This has made the process quicker because I



can now select a colour that I want from our fleece store and wash, comb and blend to get whatever colour combination I need or to suit my customers requests.

The direction of our bears is upmarket and a bit retro as I wanted them to reach a broad range of customers. Another favourite mantra of mine is 'make what you like' so my bears are mainly natural colours with the odd yellow, pink and orange thrown in for good luck. I make the bears in two sizes: 20 and 25cm for both girls and boys. The boy bears allow me to have a bit of fun so I make little striped ties for them and for the girl bears I lean more towards making them romantic with big flowers and satin bows.

My customers like to hear that I can name the alpaca that was used to make their bear and because they are handmade using my fleece I can do just that – I can name the alpaca that is used on each and every bear. This one is Neeki or that one is Savannah - my customers love that sort of thing because it makes their purchase more personal and it tells a story. Also having a handmade product that is locally grown and produced ticks a lot of my customers boxes.



One bear takes about 4-6 hours to make which is quite a bit of time but I make them whilst watching television at night, so the time goes quickly. One of the occupational hazards of using felting needles is the occasional needle through a finger. Ouch!! I learnt very quickly how to needle felt whilst watching TV without sticking a needle through my finger although sometimes I still do!! The bears are surface felted over a calico bear base that can be purchased from a craft store or you can make your own.

Steps to make bears:

1. Pull the fleece apart and shake to take out as much contamination as possible.

2. Wash the fleece - I wash using warm water to 3/4 fill the laundry tub and 1/3 cup of dishwashing liquid. Let it sit until the water goes cold. I find one fleece is better cleaned in 3 batches otherwise the wet fleece is just too heavy to handle.

When the water is cold, drain and then rinse with warm water again. You might need to do this 2-3 times - just until the water runs clear. Remember: don't use hot water or move the fleece around too much or you will felt the fleece - making it useless.

3. Dry the fleece - I dry on wire racks in the sun. Turning every once in a while.

4. Comb the fleece - using a set of wool combs. I often comb the entire washed fleece at one time so I have it on hand when I need it.

5. Cut off the bear's ears and tail – don't worry you will add the ears back later!

6. Start at the legs and lay a section of fleece on the leg and then start needle felting. You will have to stab the fleece with the needle until it is firmly attached to the leg. Then continue until you have covered the entire bear except two patches where the ears will be attached. Overlapping the fleece as you work around the bear.

7. Make the ears - on a felting pad, lay strips of fleece down and then make a 'ghost shape'. The size of this will depend on the size of the ears you want but you need to leave the bottom of the ghost un-felted because this is the section that you will use to attach the ears to the head.



Work the ghost on both sides, turning regularly, until you are happy with the shape and feel of the ears. You can add more fleece if the ears are not thick enough.



8. Attach the ears - place the first one down, laying level with the head and stab the needle along the length of the unfelted ghost shape. Stab until the ear is attached. Then gently turn the ear up to the correct position and then stab along the line that attaches the ear to the bear head. Once firmly attached do the other ear.

9. Finishing off the head - once both ears are attached get another piece of fleece and lay over the place where the ear is attached to the head. Needle felt this down - this will hide the joint where the ear was attached to the head. Repeat on both sides.

10. Finishing off the bear - now you get to decide what decorations you want and this might depend on the time of year. It might be fun to make an Easter bear or maybe Santa's Little Helper Bear - the choice is endless. Happy felting!

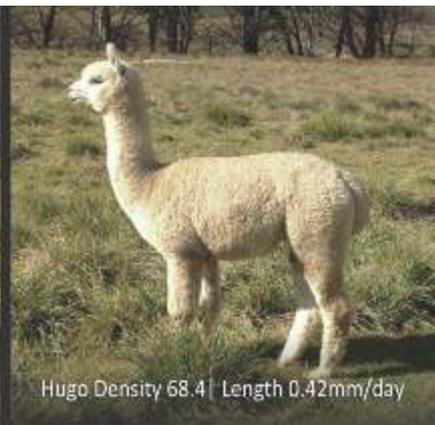
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In the Black!

An Exciting and Rewarding Journey

Rosemary Eva and Liz Coles
Longueville Park Alpaca Stud, Palmvale NSW



"Alpacas - You must be mad!", they said. "They spit, they're hard to handle and they are sooo expensive." Well, yes in 1995 the last point was very relevant but considered the norm for the purchase price of these amazing animals that were starting to make an impact on Australian farms. So with these words of "encouragement" Longueville Park embarked on the challenging and exciting journey of breeding pure blue/black alpacas. The breeding objectives were to breed alpacas that, were true blue/black, had a micron below 20 μ m, Standard Deviation below 5 μ m and a Comfort Factor of 95 - 99%, strong conformation, good temperament. The initial herd consisted of three pregnant Chilean girls of debatable age who at their first unpacking at Longueville Park each produced very average males – wethers! So the challenge was now on to source the best males available to achieve a genetic gain to start on this journey and bearing in mind there were very few blacks in the country at this time.

The Search Is On!

Armed with a matrix of 'essential' and 'desirable' characteristics to satisfy our breeding objectives, we headed off to a stud in south western NSW to assess an incredible line up of the State's best black males – it was a sight to behold! After detailed assessment of each

male the ticks and the crosses on the matrix were taking shape towards making some decisions for potential sires. From this line-up we selected the males that would improve upon our girls and fortunately our selections proved to be correct. From these selections the progeny from the next drop was a quantum leap forward and in 2000 we certified our first stud male and a year later our second stud male. Both these males were then used within the herd and each provided significant improvements that were then used in our subsequent embryo transfer programs.

It was all happening!

Steps Along the Way

Running parallel with these initiatives we also embarked on the onerous journey of showing. Exhibiting at shows was certainly the way to gain exposure and to see how our animals stacked up against others according to the Judge's decisions. Initially there were no colour classes, only age classes and when we starting being placed against the lighter colours we were confident the first step in the journey had been achieved.

Another crucial step along the way is to monitor our fleece criteria using annual histograms – it is very rewarding seeing the micron and standard deviation drop as genetics are improving the fleece quality.

Success!!

Over the years the broad ribbons started to line the office walls but that elusive Supreme always seemed to be just out of grasp. This was to change in 2009 when Longueville Park Brigalow became our first Supreme Champion followed in 2011 by Longueville Park Phoenix Rising and in 2012 by Longueville Park Milo.

Lessons Learned Along the Way

There are numerous lessons to be learnt and perhaps the most important of all is to persist with your breeding objectives.

When starting out in the industry don't be in a rush to purchase a stud male - try before you buy!

Careful selection of good stud males can quickly improve upon your 'average' females so don't confine them to the back paddock!

Don't be afraid to try several different bloodlines as the 'Supreme' recipe may well be in one or more of those combinations.

Don't expect every cria born to be a Champion but their progeny may well be!

Finally, enjoy the challenges and share your experiences with your fellow breeders – we are all part of a wonderful journey.

THE MANY USES OF ALPACA FIBRE

It's not just about yarn

By Anne Marie Harwood - Echo Beach Fibre Mill

There are so many uses of alpaca fibre and when you send your fleece to a processing mill you can have any of the following products, which can then be made into something truly original for yourself or on sold in an on farm shop or the like.

Felt is my favourite use of alpaca. Did you know that you can get two sheets of felt 1200 x 900mm out of 1kg of raw fibre? Easily enough for a jacket, 6-8 cushions or 3-4 bags.



FELT

- Garments - Vests, jackets, scarves.
- Homewares - Cushions, pillows, wall hangings.
- Handbags - My favourite - you can use almost any pattern you would use for standard fabric, with a standard sewing machine and a little experience you can make original, stunning handbags, purses or overnight bags.

ROVINGS

- Spinning - These come back to you all washed and dehaired in a bag which you can spin directly from. Whatever weight that is in the bag will be how much yarn you will end up with. No loss no mess.
- Weaving - The rovings can be used in weaving as a character weft incorporating all the wonderful natural colours and textures.
- Felting - Spread the rovings out and hand felt them into articles or garments.

BATTS

- Felting - Use layers from the batts to make felt – wet felted or needle felted

LOOSE DEHAIRD FIBRE

- Stuffing - To make a doona, just sew up two sheets of suitable fabric like calico or something nicer and fill the channels with loose fibre

YARN

- Knitting - There are many different thicknesses of yarns which can be made out of your raw fibre. 2ply - 8ply is most common. This will be returned back to you in balls, cones or skeins.
- Weaving - Any spun yarn can be used in weaving although for a warp yarn, you generally need a tighter twist for the extra strength required. For weft yarn, any thickness can be used.
- Felting - Yarn can be used as an embellishment on felt.

Anne Marie and Trevor Harwood run Echo Beach Alpacas – Fibre Processing Mill. If you would like more information Anne can be contacted at anne@echobeachalpacas.com.au or www.echobeachalpacas.com.au



HERD GUARDS



During the last few years there has been an upsurge of interest in using alpacas to guard flocks of sheep and goats against loss of lambs and kids. Many sheep farmers report lambing increases of at least 20% when running alpacas with their flock. Commercial free range poultry farmers are also finding that alpacas protect their chooks.

Q. How many alpacas do you need per head of stock?

A. The number used to protect against foxes mainly depends on the size and shape of the paddocks rather than the size of the flock. Against wild dogs and dingoes, the number required depends on the number of dogs likely to come in at any one time. Two alpacas will normally be enough to stand up to one dog, but more are required if multiple dogs can be a problem. Where dogs are concerned, the more alpacas the better.

Q. What type of alpaca is the best guard?

A. Older mature animals make the best guards. At least 18 months, preferably older to guard against foxes and over four years for dingoes and wild dogs. Males must be castrated, older unmated females also make good guards.

Q. How long does it take for alpacas to bond with the flock?

A. It is best to give alpacas a couple of weeks to get to know the paddocks and bond with the stock. However we know several farmers who after suffering severe losses from foxes, have introduced alpacas to the flock after lambing and kidding had begun with spectacular results.

Q. Are alpacas effective at protecting sheep against dingoes and wild dogs?

A. John Lawrie from Bonnie Vale Alpacas has been supplying guard alpacas for over fifteen years with excellent results and Margaret Hassall from Double-H Alpacas in the Toowoomba area of Qld regularly sends wethers to farmers in Qld and NSW, some taking up to 40 at a time to combat the huge increase in wild dog numbers. Debbie O'Neill, of Signature Alpacas, a sheep and alpaca breeder from central NSW got into breeding alpacas when she realised how well they protected her sheep. They now regularly achieve lambing rates in the 100% range.

Q. What diseases do alpacas carry?

A. Alpacas do not carry sheep or cattle lice, foot rot or get fly struck. They normally do not get many worms due to their good toileting habits but if they are run with sheep and goats they will pick up some worms and therefore require a similar drench regime as their companions. They do not contact ovine (sheep) JD, which is caused by a different strain of *M. paratuberculosis*.

Q. Is there a risk of fibre cross contamination?

A. There is very little risk as alpacas do not shed their fleeces. Alpacas do not come into physical contact with sheep unless forced to do so in yards and even then the risk is less than from dogs during yard work.

Keeping in mind that alpacas are long lived and will provide protection for many years, this makes them a worthwhile investment for many commercial farmers and gives peace of mind to many hobby farmers.

Thank you to Margaret Hassall (Double H Alpacas) John Lawrie (Bonnie Vale Alpacas) and Debbie O'Neill (Signature Alpacas) for their contribution to this article.



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