



# ALPACAS AUSTRALIA

The official publication of the Australian Alpaca Association Ltd



In this issue:

- Royal Shows
- Alpaca Week
- Neonatal Disease

Fine huacaya genetics in both black and white.



FEATURED STUD MALES



**BANKSIA PARK  
MYSTIC CHALLENGE ET**

Millpaca Alpaca Stud are proud to own this true to type male. His brilliant show record confirms he has perfect conformation with a beautiful soft, dense fleece with excellent structure.

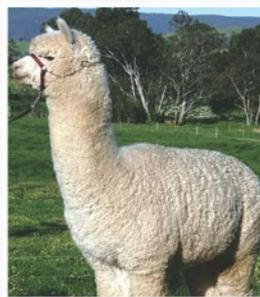
2012 - Mic 28.9 - SD 5.7 - CV 19.8



**KOORANA PARK  
BLACK KNIGHT**

Black Knight was again placed 1st in his class at the national show. He has the fleece characteristics of a seedstock (wool) stud male. Black Knight is a true to type blue/black male with fleece demonstrating fibre diameter uniformity, good density, lustre and soft handle.

2012 - Mic 27.4 - SD 4.8 - CV 17.6



**SHANBROOKE  
ACCOYO INVINCIBLE**

Invincible carries an incredible bright lustrous fleece that handles like silk. His fleece character is a bold bundling deep amplitude crimp that peels open into individual staples. He has good width of chest on a large frame with sound bone. His follicular density is 63.1 with a secondary to primary ratio of 11.

2012 - Mic 24 - SD 4.7 - CV 19.8  
Fleece weight 6.1kg



**CANCHONES  
YATAGAN ET**

Canchones Yatagan is a blue black male with exceptional substance of bone, luster and handle. Do to his quality and follicular density he is a SRS recommended male.

2012 - Mic 29.9 - SD 6.5 - CV 21.8

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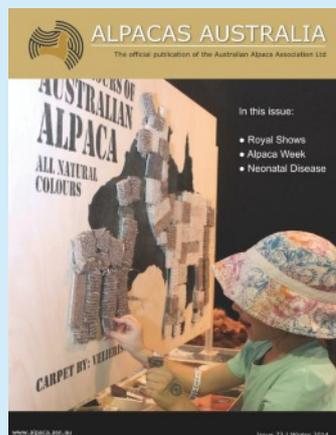
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Cover: Natural Fibres Pavilion Sydney Royal 2014

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# President's Message

As a membership services organisation, the Australian Alpaca Association has the role of representing the industry and its members to government, and promoting of alpaca farming as a viable agricultural business. In early March our General Manager, Craig Taberner, and myself attended the ABARES Outlook conference, which provided some useful insights and afforded introductions to contacts in government, industry and service providers. I briefly met our Agriculture Minister, The Honourable Barnaby Joyce, who now has a greater awareness of the Australian Alpaca industry following the successful 'Cria Muster' on the lawns of Parliament House in the lead up to Australian Alpaca Week.

In total 105 members participated in the Open Farms/Alpaca Week promotion this year. The Royal Agricultural Society of NSW (RAS) provided us with the opportunity to anchor a display promoting Natural Fibres at Sydney Royal Easter Show. We were provided high traffic space along the Daily Telegraph Walk at no cost, ensuring visibility throughout the 10 days of the show to close to 900,000 visitors. An industry display was also presented in the Munro Pavilion across the Easter period in conjunction with the alpaca judging, ensuring maximum visibility for our industry. Many regional shows are also underway, providing the opportunity to inform and educate the public in both city and country areas. A huge thank you to those who volunteered their time and energy in the organisation and delivery of these events, delivering a positive message about the future of the alpaca industry.



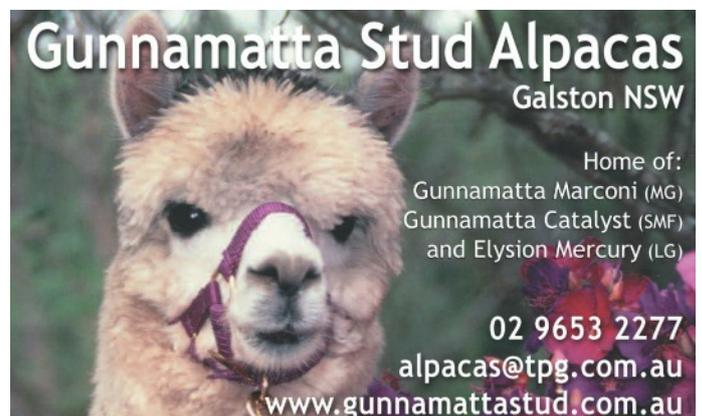
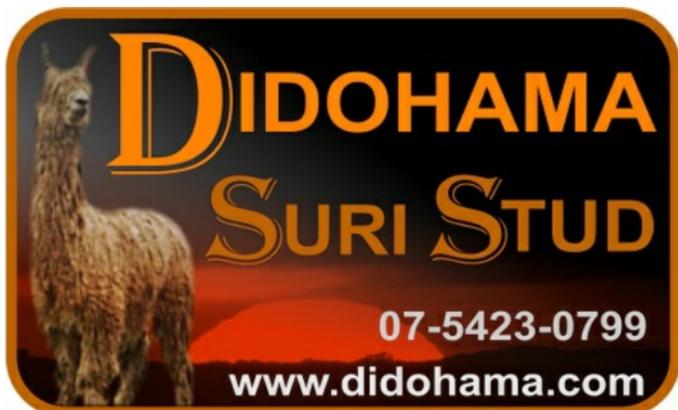
The content of the Natural Fibre Showcase has been designed for utilisation as a travelling exhibition, that will work in conjunction with displays for other natural fibres, or to stand alone to promote alpaca fleece. An overview of the display content, space and support requirements is under development in order to promote the display to other Royal Show Societies and Field Day organisers, with the intention of creating a calendar of events where the display will be used. Local support and assistance is critical for each event, and will rely on regional assistance to deliver a strong, positive message about the Australian Alpaca industry.

Our National Conference was held in Adelaide from 9-11 May, followed by Farm Tours on Monday 12 May. This was an outstanding event, with quality speakers addressing a range of topics of relevance to every alpaca producer, updating us on the latest developments in research, alpaca and camelid health, fibre processing and how we can market our businesses. The social events gave those attending the opportunity to mingle and to extend our network of contacts, in a highly enjoyable setting. The conference was organised by a small, hardworking team in South Australia, with assistance from the office, and I would like to acknowledge their efforts and thank them for creating a great event.

There is much to be proud of across our industry and I would like to recognise and applaud the contribution of the multitudes of volunteers who promote our industry through a range of events and activities. Our office staff, regional committee members, reference panel and working group members and my fellow AAA Directors also work hard as the representatives of the AAA membership, and I thank them on your behalf.

Kind regards

Michelle Malt  
AAA President



# General Manager's Message

Since commencing in February, I have engaged internally with many passionate and enthusiastic AAA members over the phone, via email, when visiting farms during Australian Alpaca Week, the Sydney Royal Show and when attending the 2014 National Alpaca Excellence Conference.

During March, President Michelle Malt and I attended the ABARES Outlook Conference in Canberra and incorporated several important meetings. We engaged with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF); namely the Assistant Director, Agriculture Productivity, Wool and Dairy, and the Senior Veterinary Officer, Live Animal Exports and had interaction post conference with the Veterinary Officer, Food and Animal By-Products, Export Standards Branch. The basic purpose of the meetings was to help form relationships with DAFF staff responsible for negotiating overseas market access for animal products, and to understand more about the export process for fibre and hide.

We also met with Government Relations Australia (GRA) which is a nationally based company who interact with government ministers and their offices, parliamentarians of all political parties, agency heads and officials, and other key influential groups. We consider GRA to be a potential partner to align AAA strategies and tactics to effectively progress matters with government and influence broader policy outcomes. The CEO of Agri-Food Skills Australia and the Manager, Continuous Improvement also met with Michelle and me, and provided an overview of funding challenges and industry related training issues facing the AAA.

To keep in theme with AAA's role of advocating to Government, AAA Board, Management, and members of the Fibre Market Development Reference Panel attended nationwide consultation sessions in April with respect to the Government's White Paper on Agricultural Competitiveness. The White Paper is to provide government with a platform for enhancing the contribution of agriculture to economic growth, employment creation and national prosperity, through increased innovation, productivity, investment and trade. AAA then lodged an industry submission to the White Paper which can be viewed at: <http://agriculturalcompetitiveness.dpmc.gov.au/published-submissions>.

The Cria Muster held on the lawns of Canberra Parliament to promote Australian Alpaca Week 2014 and the national industry, was an outstanding success. Bipartisan support was on show from the Agriculture Minister, Barnaby Joyce, and the Shadow Agriculture Minister, Joel Fitzgibbon. Other politicians who showed interest and support included Senator Claire Moore (QLD), Minister Assisting the Prime Minister in Regional Development; Jamie Briggs, Federal Member for Mayo and the Member for Hume, Angus Taylor. I thank all those involved who made the muster happen, which has given the AAA White Paper submission more strength.

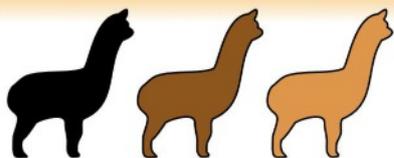
In closing, I encourage all members to visit the AAA Facebook page. It is a quick and easy way to access all the latest AAA news, even if you are not a Facebook user you can still view the AAA Facebook page and remain up-to-date.

Regards

Craig Taberner  
AAA General Manager



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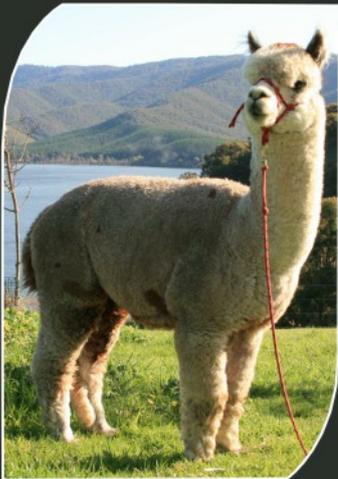
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# News & Views

**FairAir**  
**FIRE MASK**

Way back in 2011 we reported on a new product that uses alpaca fibre as a core ingredient. Mike Taylor of Mandurang South, Victoria was recognised at the Bendigo Inventor of the Year Awards for his "Fair Air" fire mask winning the \$10,000 Innovator of the Year Award.

From many years of fighting fires Mike had realised that the synthetic masks available had the potential to melt onto the skin, were too hot to wear for long and interfered with speech or helmet, simply collapsed when wet or really didn't seal properly. After research he realized the thermal and fire retardant properties of alpaca were ideal for his purposes and the long struggle started to get the masks accepted for general use.

Three years later Mike is still battling bureaucracy to get his alpaca fire mask accepted for general use by the authorities.

He now has endorsement from the ACT Rural Fire Service who have endorsed his mask for all their firefighters. Over 150 Rural Fire Brigades all over the country are now using the mask and The Asthma Foundation of Victoria are now selling them as the core component of a fire ready kit for asthmatics. Recently the Victorian police purchased some as they find the alternatives unsatisfactory, especially when crawling in roofspaces or under houses looking for weapons and drugs etc.

There is still a way to go to get into full production and Mike may have to sell his house to fund the project to have his own manufacturing facility in regional Victoria. Anyone interested in reading more about the product can go to [www.fairairmasks.com](http://www.fairairmasks.com)



## AAA Book Deal

Buy both Cameron Holt's 'A Definitive Guide To Alpaca Fibre' & the AAA's 'Alpaca Fleece Classing' for only \$130!

Offer valid until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014 only or until sold out.

Normal price is A Definitive Guide to Alpaca Fibre \$120 & Alpaca Fleece Classing \$33.

Available on line through the AAA shop.

## Deadline for articles & advertising Issue 73

1 July 2014

Magazine Due - September 2014

All editorial contributions should be typed and preferably submitted electronically as a Word document.

Photographs should be digital, high resolution, sent as attachments, to ensure good reproduction.

Advertising should match specs provided by the AAA office.

## Apology

In an article sourced from New Zealand on fleece collection, the statement was made that "Australia has had trouble with the cooperative model, which has now been bought by someone outside Australia, complete with their Quality Mark"

I should like to apologise for not making a correction to the above statement. Less than 30% of AAFL shares are overseas owned, the majority being owned by AAA and AAA members. AAA Editor.



# Sydney Royal Alpaca and Fleece Show

By Paul Haslin - Convenor

The Sydney Royal is a key event on the showing calendar for many studs from right across the country and this year was certainly no exception.

With four hundred alpacas entered in the halter classes, exhibitors converged on the Sydney Showgrounds from all over NSW as well as Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia. More than just a show, this is a gathering of the clan. Time to catch up with old friends and make some new ones.

Of course, the main game is the competition and this commenced some two weeks before we all arrived with the judging of the fleeces. Judge, Kylie Martin from Victoria and a slick stewarding team led by Helen Fritsch made short work of the daunting presentation of 260 fleeces to be appraised. Honours in the huacaya section went to Victoria Park Alpacas, a small breeder from the Southern Highlands in NSW, whilst Surilana carried off the prize for Supreme Suri fleece.

The competition events at the showground commenced with the Youth Paraders events. Jillian Holmes from Victoria put an enthusiastic group of fifty youngsters through their paces in the Showmanship and Stockmanship classes.



Supreme Champion Suri Fleece - Surilana Macusani Lash - Surilana



*Supreme Champion Huacaya Fleece - Victoria Park Beau - Victoria Park*

With the fleece scores tallied the battleground was set for the coveted Most Successful Exhibitor awards. Although it was a neck and neck struggle for a while, Softfoot cleared out for a convincing win to take the Harriet Davison trophy, awarded for the most successful overall huacaya exhibitor.

Our judges for the halter classes were Natasha Clark from Victoria and Steve Ridout from Western Australia. Surilana overwhelmed the opposition with the quality of their stock to take most of the prizes in the suri section including the trophy for Supreme Champion.

The huacaya section was more of a tussle with Softfoot performing consistently well throughout the two and a half days of competition but in the end the glory of Supreme Champion went to a joint entry between Ambersun and Millpaca.



*Best Suri in Show - Surilana Jamaica - Surilana*



*Most Successful Overall Huacaya Exhibitor - Softfoot  
Sandy & Gary Retallick receive award presented by Ian Davison & Family*



*Best Huacaya in Show - Ambersun Fortune Seeker - Ambersun/Millpaca*



Grand Champion Female Huacaya - Softfoot Basinata - Softfoot



Grand Champion Male Suri - Surilana Mind Blowing - Surilana

Monday evening saw the end of judging and the start of merrymaking. The Sydney Royal show ring party has earned a reputation as a lively end to the formalities and this year proved no exception with plenty of refreshment, plenty of dancing and a few other antics!

A quiet Tuesday morning and time for nine young judges to contest the Junior Judging competition. As usual at Sydney, the skills and presentation of these youngsters leaves us in no doubt that we have some fine judges to come through the ranks in years to come.

So to the end of another Sydney Royal and farewells as everyone prepares for the trek home with promises to do it all again next year.

## Key Results

Huacaya Halter	Exhibit	Exhibitor
Grand Ch Female	Softfoot Basinata CH	Softfoot
Grand Ch Male	Ambersun Fortune Seeker	Ambersun/Millpaca
Best in Show	Ambersun Fortune Seeker	Ambersun/Millpaca
Most Successful Halter Exhibitor		Softfoot

## Huacaya Fleece

Supreme Ch Fleece	Victoria Park Beau	Victoria Park
Most Successful Fleece Exhibitor		Alpha Centauri
Most Successful Overall Huacaya Exhibitor		Softfoot

## Suri Halter

Grand Ch Female	Surilana Jamaica	Surilana
Grand Ch Male	Surilana Mind Blowing	Surilana
Best in Show	Surilana Jamaica	Surilana
Most Successful Halter Exhibitor		Surilana

## Suri Fleece

Supreme Ch Fleece	Surilana Macusani Lash	Surilana
Most Successful Fleece Exhibitor		Baarrooka
Most Successful Overall Suri Exhibitor		Surilana

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# Natural Fibres Pavillion

By Green Green Grass Communications

“It’s soooo soft!”, “It’s soooo soft.”

Utter these same words only 899,998 more times, to capture the full scale of the Australian Alpaca industry’s 14 day presence at the 2014 Sydney Royal Easter Show. The close to 900 000 crowd, attending the largest single public event in the Southern Hemisphere, flocked through the AAA’s brand new and very sophisticated educational fleece exhibit.

Young and old alike met animals, learned about the unique benefits of alpaca fleece and above all, they touched. They touched the (very patient) live alpacas. They touched the carpet mosaic. They touched fleece samples. They touched yarns and blankets, spun and woven before their eyes. They touched and tried garments. As they touched, over and over, they sighed “It’s soooo soft,” and they learned: Australian Alpaca is precious.

“What’s the difference between an Alpaca and a Llama?” was heard almost as often from the crowd, and that difference is now official. Banana ears are as they may be. But now what also sets Australian Alpaca apart are 12 roadcases, ten banners, five interactive activity stations, and above all the energy and creativity of some 60+ motivated human beings who teamed up to celebrate the extraordinary quality of our local herds.

As AAA Ltd Board Member directing Marketing, Dinah Fisher said, one of the best aspects of the exhibit was that “it was highly interactive. Adults and children alike played intuitively with its elements and admired the lightness, softness, and warmth”. The quality messaging worked hard to appeal on many levels and be memorable and inspiring.

The AAA’s Australian Alpaca Showcase exhibit was created at the invitation of the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW to be their featured textile for the newly created Natural Fibre Showcase. It aims to build public understanding and regard for our clever livestock and their beautiful fibre.

Custom designed and produced by green, green grass communications for the AAA, the Showcase was then beautifully brought to life by participating members who helped man the stand and make it the rich, interesting display that it was.

The Alpaca Fashion Selfie moment was a hit, with all leaping into the spirit of it and commenting on how soft the garments were.





And now this Showcase has a chance to appear within reach of your stud. AAA Ltd President Michelle Malt praises the value of the Showcase in presenting inspiring messages about Australian Alpaca product in a format that offers benefit to all AAA members around Australia, and providing a consistent message, theme and image of the AAA and the alpaca industry in Australia. "We created the Showcase to appear first at this year's Easter Show, with the brief that it be portable and robust enough to then tour nationally, offering value to all regions throughout the year to spread the word about precious Australian Alpaca and to increase awareness of alpaca as an emerging part of the Australian agribusiness landscape", she said.

For more information on how the Australian Alpaca Showcase can help you educate people in your area about Australian Alpaca, contact [kris@alpaca.asn.au](mailto:kris@alpaca.asn.au).

With the positive & inspiring messages presented in this superb exhibit now accessible for all public events around our nation, Australian Alpaca's Very Smart Future is very assured.

*There are far too many people and organisations to thank for their Showcase support this year. Without the generosity of the RAS, Coolawarra Alpacas, Velieris Carpets, Dairy Road Alpacas, the House of Alpaca, The Alpaca Centre, AAFL, and the many members who volunteered their time as industry information officers, the Easter Showcase could not have happened. The AAA regional team also worked very hard to present Australian Alpaca at its best in their Munro Pavilion exhibit, ensuring we had this year's Easter Show crowds well and truly warm to the charms of Australian Alpaca.*





# MillDuck Genetics

## Consistently Competitive

### in “Best Colour in Show”

#### 2013: (Major Shows)

- **MillDuck Oregon**
- **MillDuck Preston**
- MillDuck Oregon
- MillDuck Pittsburgh
- **MillDuck Oregon**

- Best Brown**
- Best Black**
- Best Brown
- Best Brown
- Supreme Brown**

- AAA National**
- AAA National**
- Sydney Royal
- Melbourne Royal
- Colourbration**

#### 2012: (Major Shows)

- **MillDuck Oregon**
- MillDuck Namatjira
- MillDuck Oregon
- MillDuck Namatjira
- **MillDuck Oxford**
- MillDuck Oregon

- Best Brown**
- Best Brown
- Supreme Brown
- Premier Brown
- Supreme Med/Dark Fawn**
- Best Brown

- AAA National**
- Sydney Royal
- Colourama
- AlpacaFest
- Colourbration**
- Melbourne Royal

#### 2011: (Major Shows)

- MillDuck Manhattan
- MillDuck Nikki-Louise
- MillDuck Manhattan
- MillDuck Nikki -Louise
- MillDuck Mandela
- MillDuck Maddox
- MillDuck Manhattan
- MillDuck Namatjira

- Best Med/Dark Fawn
- Best Brown
- Premier Med/Dark Fawn
- Premier Brown
- Premier Black
- Supreme Brown
- Supreme Med/Dark Fawn
- Best Brown

- Sydney Royal
- Sydney Royal
- AlpacaFest
- AlpacaFest
- AlpacaFest
- Colour Classic
- Colour Classic
- Melbourne Royal

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**MillDuck Oregon**  
**Best Brown in Show**  
**2012 & 2013 AAA National**



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

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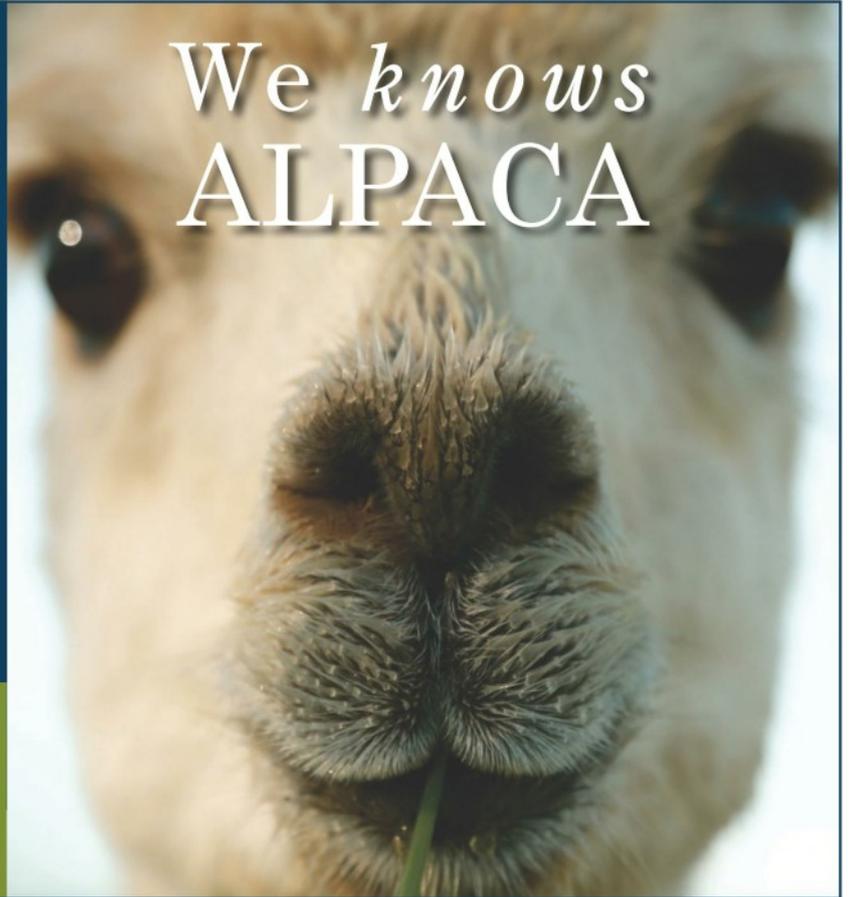
From one life spent in the Merino industry, and another spent in science, we bring to the alpaca industry the inspiration for a fleece-perfect Australian alpaca breeding programme.

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The alpaca is a unique animal.

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While the alpaca was reintroduced to Australia over 26 years ago, the industry has been really gathering momentum in the last decade. Bloodlines have been vastly improved and Australia's genetics are now the most sort after in the world. The national herd has exploded from 26,000 in 2000 to over 400,000 today\*

Alpacas produce fine, lustrous fleece and a lean, high protein meat that is fast becoming a fine dining favourite with chefs around the country. The advent of a thriving meat industry brings a new maturity to this already great primary industry.

Always a great choice environmentally, Alpaca farming is now a genuine, commercially sustainable rural industry built on solid foundations, ensuring the industry's dynamic future growth.

\*Department of Agriculture and Fisheries



# Industry Showcase

## Sydney Royal Easter Show 2014

By Graeme Dickson - Project Coordinator



Some six months ago the AAA Organizing Committee of the Sydney Royal Easter Show asked “what could we do to fill up some spare space we have in the alpaca pavilion at show time?”

With that simple request, an array of questions followed which kept a large team of volunteers very busy for many months:

- How much space?
- What do we want to show the public?
- How do we fund it?
- Who will design it?
- Can we staff it?

Thanks to the generosity of Millpaca Stud we immediately had a financial backer. Millpaca just happen to have a relative who is principal of JCME Marketing and was persuaded to carry out the design and fit out in true professional style.

It was decided that we needed to show the public – read consumer - just what Australian alpacas are bred for – fleece and meat. Only quality Australian product would be showcased. Our layout was designed to display the harvesting and collection of fleece, how to handle the fleece and then the finished products. A secondary display would show the benefits of alpaca meat.

With the central stage being set up as a shearing area, an alpaca was shorn on the hour every hour for the six days, some 50 animals in total. The shorn fleece was taken to a skirting area, sorted, bagged and baled ready for shipment to be sent to a classer.

## So what happens next?

The next three display rooms consisted of:

- A fully furnished bedroom incorporating alpaca carpet from Velieris, doonas, pillows, throw rugs and cushions from The House of Alpaca.
- A casual living room/TV room with a specially made alpaca floor rug from Velieris, cushions and throws again supplied by The House of Alpaca and alpaca hides from Millpaca. A DVD covering regional alpaca activities and alpaca fashion played continuously on the screen.



The third room contained products made from Australia alpaca in Australia.

- A range of fine-knit ladies and men's jumpers, scarves, and commercial cones of fine dyed yarn from Nicoletta (NSW). These products created enormous interest with visitors exclaiming the WOW factor when handling the products. Made in Australia from Australian alpaca, made from 90% alpaca and 10% cashmere.
- Ladies' purses and men's wallets made from alpaca leather from Keith & Isi Cameron (WA). The softness and quality manufacture of these products impressed the public and we soon exhausted our supply of business cards from the makers.
- Complete sample range of alpaca carpet from Velieris (Vic). The impressive range of carpet styles now available is a credit to Velieris.
- Doonas, pillows, throw rugs and knitting yarn from The House of Alpaca (NSW) which impressed the visitors with the lightness of the products.
- And finally a range of natural coloured alpaca hides decorated the floor and were available for the public to feel the softness of the fleece on these hides. All colours were from Millpaca Stud.



The fourth display area was for alpaca meat and the Illawarra Prime Alpaca presentation highlighted an excellent range of refrigerated cuts of alpaca meats, together with lots of information for chefs on cooking and availability. This innovative section of the display received considerable interest from the public. But wait, we still had more space to fill!

The AAA stand was manned by a range of AAA volunteer members who promoted alpacas and fielded all the usual and unusual alpaca questions. But how could we involve the young members of the public, and as it turned out, the not so young?

"Meet the Alpaca" came into existence with specially chosen teams of quiet alpacas from Bonatan Alpacas being led around a simple obstacle course by children drawn from the Easter Show crowds. Proud parents and grandparents became fixated on alpaca photography as their charges progressed around the "meet the alpaca" course.

The queue for this activity just kept getting longer every day with an estimated 3,000 handlers taking part. By the end of the show I think the alpacas led the children around the course.



Our next surprise package was the felting exhibition which also allowed for public participation. Thanks to Sue Green from Maple Lodge Alpacas and her team of helpers, we had a constant flow of both children and adults practising their felting skills. For the six days Sue calculated that over 800 pieces of felted alpaca "art" were made and proudly taken home.

One last surprise was our suited alpaca (see the photos), again supplied by Millpaca Alpaca Stud – a real crowd pleaser for young and old! Sometimes called Allouetta and sometimes just called Al, it even participated in the shearing, reacting to just how an alpaca feels when being handled and shorn by the shearers.

So from humble beginnings the Alpaca Industry Showcase exposed our industry to many tens of thousands of potential consumers who are now educated about alpaca products made in Australia from Australian alpaca.

Our sincere thanks go to Millpaca Stud at Berry for their generous support and to JCME Marketing for their professional advice, organization and design.

To our hard-working teams of volunteers we say a huge thank you for the donation of your time and energy. The commitment to six days straight at Sydney Royal as a volunteer brings a certain level of fatigue that is only counterbalanced by the satisfaction of a job well done, (followed by the odd nanna nap when it's all over!)

We acknowledge the following:

#### **Shearing**

John Hay (MC), Chris Power (shearer), Craig (wrangler), Joey Nelson, John Dawson & Kurt Parker (roustabouts)

#### **Skirting**

Peter Nelson and Robert Fletcher for the skirting table and wool pack stands

#### **Meet the alpaca**

Jenni and Geoff Smith & family, Karen & Rex DiBona & family, Jessica Burns and the many other young assistants.

#### **Felting**

Sue Green, Sharon Coulston, Hayley Ridgeway and Simon Roberts

#### **AAA Stand**

Debra & Stephen Trostian and their team of volunteers

#### **Meat Display**

Ian Frith  
Sharon Dawson

#### **RAS Staff**

For their ability to produce out of thin air exactly what we needed and when we needed it! Vic Lee and Steve Wells.



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# Fiesta in Arequipa

By Karine Raiz, Surilox Alpacas & MTA Travel



Fiesta - an event at the top of an alpaca breeder's wish list and it's on this year!

As an alpaca breeder & travel agent I know that this opportunity is too good to miss. Fiesta actually celebrates an amazing event, the wild vicuna shearing. Called Chaccu Vicuna, the vicuna are herded, shorn quickly and released. It is colourful and exciting! High on the altiplano, surrounded by volcanoes, Fiesta is held in the white and pink city of Arequipa every 3 years. There will be over 1,000 alpacas being judged at the National Peruvian Show; fashion shows, business exchanges, cultural nights, handicrafts and the opportunity to meet and visit the major processors. There is so much to see and do that the Fiesta program takes 5 whole days.

From Arequipa you must travel to the Colca Canyon where the Condors fly, you'll see alpacas grazing on the altiplano and the simple shelters that protect alpacas from puma at night. Once in Colca go for a swim in the hot springs.

So what else is there to see and do in Peru? Before going to Arequipa I suggest a visit to Lima, a must see for any alpaca breeder is the Larco Herrera museum with its piece of 400 TC hand spun, hand woven alpaca cloth. South of Lima are Ica & Paracas where you can eat Ceviche on the beach and take a swift boat ride out to the Little Galapagos. And where better to drink a Pisco Sour than Pisco? This is also the perfect point to take a flight over the Nazca Plains. After Arequipa, where you'll probably chew coca for the first (maybe only) time in your life, the next destination should be the Inca city of Cuzco. A wonderful city with its buildings built from the original Inca houses, much of this city is still Inca. You can't miss the Koriancha, & Sacsayhuaman – the Inca celebration site of the nobility. Spend time in the Sacred Valley visiting traditional markets and the Inca fortress of Ollantaytambo, and then explore the lost city of Machu Picchu.

From Cusco it is a drive across the top of the Andes, make sure you visit the Temple of Wiracocha en route to Lake Titicaca. You can do this by train but by coach it is so much more exciting. Stay on the banks of Lake Titicaca the highest fresh water lake in the world. And whilst here you must visit one of the floating islands and experience a truly spectacular and unique way of life.

Andean Conexiones have been associated with Andean communities for some years and an opportunity has arisen this year for a visit to a small village just outside of Písaq in the Sacred Valley. Visitors will be able to meet local weavers and

maybe get some hands-on experience, see rock art and experience an authentic Andean village and also to visit a girls school that is supported by Andean Conexiones. This special day is the first in some new travel & social programs that have been devised to increase awareness and understanding of Peruvian culture while promoting social, economic and environmental sustainability.

If you'd like to know more email [kraiz@mtatravel.com.au](mailto:kraiz@mtatravel.com.au) or go to my pages on the MTA site <http://agents.mtatravel.com.au/karine> or visit [andeanconexiones.org](http://andeanconexiones.org)

**Fiesta in Arequipa**  
**November 2014**

Tour departs 5 November 2014

**Karine Raiz** [kraiz@mtatravel.com.au](mailto:kraiz@mtatravel.com.au)  
Alpaca Breeder & Travel Agent 0417 240 705

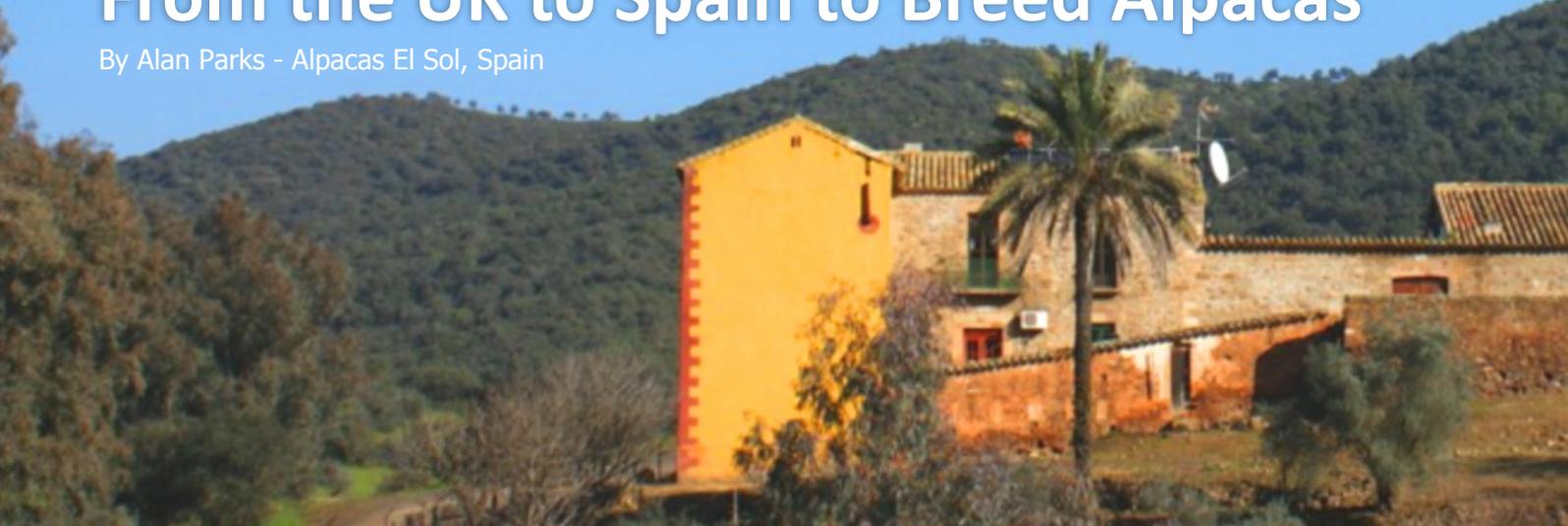
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# Viva España!

## From the UK to Spain to Breed Alpacas

By Alan Parks - Alpacas El Sol, Spain



In June 2007, my partner Lorna, a dance teacher of 30 years, turned to me and said "Alan, I'm not sure how much longer I can go on teaching." She had been ill for about a year, struggling with fatigue and energy and having terrible problems with her eyes. It was then I suggested we move to Florida in the US, to have a fresh start. "No, it's too far away from the kids." She said to me. "Maybe somewhere closer to home?" The conversation turned to Spain, and we both thought it might be a good idea.

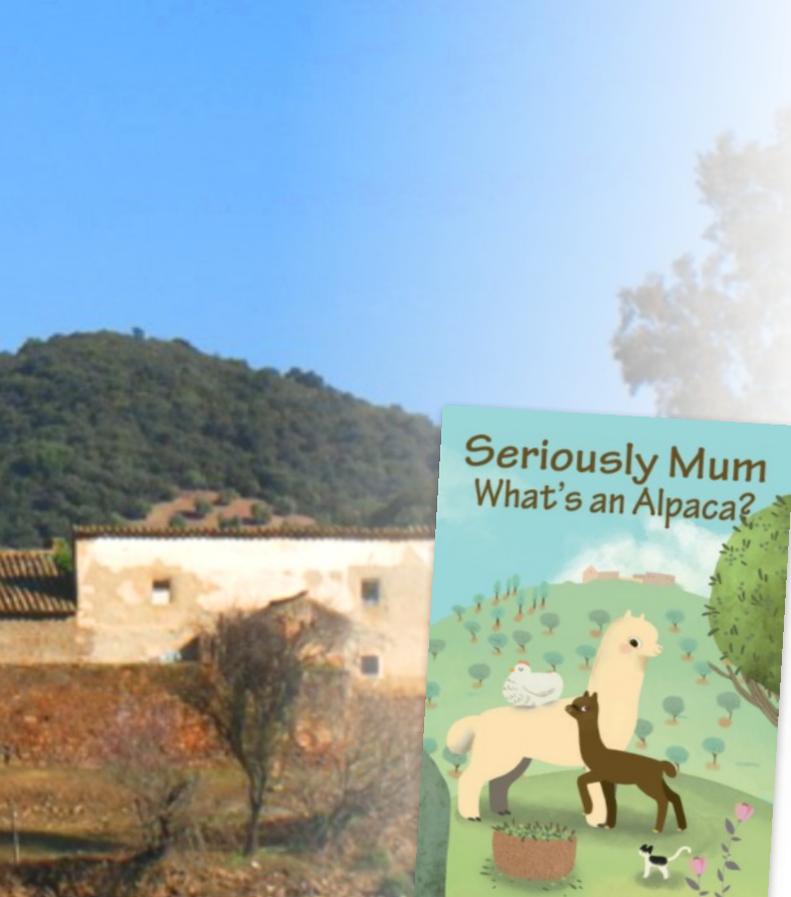
Ever since we had met an ugly alpaca (very big teeth and lonely) in Prague Zoo, we had always sought out these unusual animals whenever we visited a farm or a zoo. At some stage I must have googled 'alpacas' and found a whole industry surrounding them, right under our noses in the UK, and we had hardly even heard of these animals. This was just before the worldwide crisis hit and alpaca farmers in the UK were making good money. "We could breed alpacas in Spain." I said to Lorna.



We signed up to visit an alpaca farm for a day, then we had to tell Lorna's daughter about our plans. "Bloody hell Mum, what's an Alpaca?" was her response. Over the next few months we got used to this reaction from most people we told of our plans. We thoroughly enjoyed our day at the alpaca farm, and we were put in touch with a couple who had already moved some alpacas to Andalucia in Spain, and it went from there. We put down a deposit on four pregnant females, and nervously held our breath while we waited for them to come to our farm.

We had bought an old, renovated Olive Mill in the Olive Groves of Cordoba, Andalucia. It had been home to about 8 horses, so we felt that it would be perfect for our new venture.

We had been advised (from books, internet and know-it-alls), that we should be learning Spanish before we left. Luckily, at one of the schools where Lorna taught, there was a lovely half Greek, half native New York man who had lived in Madrid, and was the teacher of Spanish to the juniors. This was perfect, we felt we needed the basics. We were able to walk through our Spanish abc's and our basic numbers, and learn some important phrases like, "Más despacio, por favor" which means 'more slowly please'. The Spanish have a tendency to combine all the words in a sentence into one long drawn-out word, without taking a breath, so it can be difficult to understand, especially where we were going to live. The lessons went okay: we managed to learn a little, but mainly we laughed a lot. However, after we arrived in Spain we realised that the Andalucian accent is strong, and they 'eat' a lot of their letters and tend to not even pronounce the letter 's'. Ever! Throw on top of that, in the area where we live, the majority of people are farmers, many of whom cannot even read or write, and you will understand why three months of learning proper Spanish, with proper pronunciation, did not stand us in very good stead. We have since been told, in no uncertain terms by a local lady, that if we wanted to speak proper Spanish, we should have moved to Madrid.



We had to try to obtain a licence, to enable us to move the animals from Ronda, where they were agisted, to our house. We had heard that getting these licences could be a bit difficult, as some people had been told they needed zoo or exotic animal licences. We armed ourselves with photos of cute baby alpacas, and headed to the local offices of OCA (the Spanish version of Defra), and tried to speak to the girls behind the reception desk. We showed them the photos of the alpacas, and said simply, "*Perdón, Inglés.*" (This was about the extent of our Spanish for months, if not years.) One of the girls spoke a (very) little English but she said she had called the head *veterinario* and we were to wait here.

A stern-faced woman in her mid-30s appeared from an office, and made her way towards us. She, happily, did speak a little English and we were able to explain that we had moved to the area and would like to keep some alpacas at our house. We showed our pictures and she explained to the girls behind the desk about the photos and what alpacas were. There was much "oohing" and "aahing" over the photos, and they didn't seem to believe these animals would be living in Montoro. After that we felt that they were on our side; the vet said she would look into it for us, if we could wait for a few minutes. "Sit down, Alan," she said sternly. I don't think it was meant to come across as though I was being told off, but I felt suitably chastised. It was just the Spanish way of speaking. They were, in actual fact, very helpful, and we were told that all we needed to do, was speak to the local vet, who would come to our house and see if it was suitable for alpacas, and then draw up a plan to submit to OCA for the licence. As there had been horses there before, they didn't think we would have any issues. This meant the next port of call was the town vet. We visited Manuel, the vet, whom we had been told had a good grasp of English. We had heard correctly: his English was much better than our Spanish was, and still is now, in fact.

"Manuel, we would like to bring some animals here, to Montoro, to breed them and keep them at our house in the countryside. They are called alpacas!" "Alpacas? I don't understand. Alpacas are food for horses? No?" Okay, so his English wasn't that good. But we did manage to establish that alpacas in Spanish means 'bales of hay'. We have become proficient in explaining that alpacas are similar to llamas (pronounced ymmas!).

We were able to ask firstly, if he would come to our house to do the OCA paperwork, and secondly, would he be happy to be our vet and treat the alpacas if we needed him. We explained what little we knew, including how healthy and hardy alpacas as a species are. Of course he had never seen an alpaca, but he said he would be happy to have us as clients, and he would do a little research in the meantime. The only problem was (and is), although Manuel is an emergency vet, he does not drive, so we have to go and collect him from the town, which does involve a one-hour round trip. One of the downsides of living so far in the countryside, I guess!

Of course things were not going to go as planned. Our first two girls were delivered to us, and within weeks, at our first shearing, we discovered Black Dancer had a terrible skin condition on her stomach. We were treating that, when a few days later she had a choking incident while eating her concentrated food. It lasted for an hour, and she didn't seem to be able to clear the obstruction. We called out our vet, who had never seen an alpaca let alone had to treat one. And using a tube he managed to clear the obstruction, but he was concerned, and he thought Black Dancer was a very sick animal. A few days later she aborted the cria she was carrying. We were in bits and we didn't know what to do. The following day I was travelling back to the UK for a neo-natal course and had to leave Lorna to care for Black Dancer and deal with getting the aborted cria to an autopsy. A few days later, after doing all we could, Black Dancer died. It was terribly sad. It was during this time we learnt a phrase that has become well known to us now. "If you raise livestock, you have to learn to deal with dead stock." Of course, it sounds obvious, but I am not sure it is something all alpaca owners consider when they buy in to this dream.

We then decided to send the other girl, Cassandra, back to the farm where they came from for a while as she was now on her own, and we were in a state of shock, and didn't really know where to go with our alpaca dream.

Of course moving the alpacas to Andalucia was somewhat of a test for alpacas. When any new breed of animal is introduced to an area, it will take time for them to adjust. Our girls had been raised in the UK, with abundant grass to feed on year round. Now they were getting hay of various sorts and varying quality. There were a few instances of alpacas dying from oleander poisoning, as this is one plant that is indigenous to this part of Spain. Also, green acorns caused a problem for some youngsters, and trees had to be netted. One of our young cria, about eight months old, escaped and gorged himself on fallen figs and acted like a sick child for a few hours until we managed to settle his stomach. He still loves figs now. I think (and I have never been to Australia) that our pasture is very much like Australia. Terribly dry in the summer, and we have to feed (and buy) hay. If we have good winter rain we are able to grow grass before it gets too hot, which of course they love.

While she was away, Cassandra was kept in isolation with one of the other girls we had bought, and she had a beautiful male cria, who we named Rafa. Nadal had just won his first Wimbledon and Rafael means 'healed by God' so we felt it was apt. After a few months, and a few other health issues at the farm that had to be resolved including an outbreak of bTB, we took delivery of Cassandra and Rafa plus our other two girls, Bermuda and Lily. It was a great moment but also the cause of much nervousness. The girls were all pregnant, and due to give birth in the autumn, so we were in for an anxious few months. First up was Cassandra, and in October she had a textbook birth and produced Galaxy, a lovely chocolate coloured boy. Then, up next was Lily, who gave birth while Lorna was in the UK attending the birth of her first grandchild, and all seemed to be progressing well, but after four days I found the cria crashed on the ground and she never recovered. Lily was devastated. Finally, Bermuda was due to give birth in January, or so we thought.

On Christmas Eve I looked out of the window to see Bermuda acting unusually, and I said to Lorna, "I think she is going to have the baby!" We rushed out, in the pouring rain to witness once again a textbook birth. But this time we were nervous. It was mid-afternoon and winter, and when the cria didn't latch on quickly to take his first milk, we went looking for a vet. After some phone calls we arranged to meet an emergency horse vet in the car park of Cordoba Football Club. We had some blood plasma we had acquired after the last problems, so we asked him to administer it to the cria. By torchlight, in the car park, the vet was unable to find the vein, and after a couple of hours, we decided to take cria home, shut him in the stable with his Mum for the night and pray. When we arrived home, Bermuda's instincts seemed to kick in and we left them to it, and went for a

night of fitful sleep. The following morning we rushed out to see what was happening. All was good. Santa (as he became known), was latching on and suckling from mum. What a day.

Ever since then, as you can imagine, we are nervous wrecks. Until this year, we have had no planned pregnancies, although we did have some escapees and Lily lost another cria, but there were problems in the birth and the cria lost a lot of blood from the umbilical cord. When the cria finally died, Lily actually shed a real tear. Even the vet saw it.

This year the girls are pregnant, we decided it was only fair for them, so we will need to consider moving some of our boys on to new pastures. We have had some interest from expats moving over to Spain, and hopefully they will go to lovely new homes. The Spanish people have yet to take alpacas to their hearts although there is a growing number of farms, particularly in the north of Spain, where the pasture is better. We have people visit our farm for alpaca days out and we also have self-catering holidays and alpaca trekking trips, which kids seem to love.

Although we have had a pretty rough ride as alpaca owners we still love these animals and spread the word about them far and wide, as they are a wonderful addition to any farm. Now, if only we could spin, then we would be able to make our own socks!!

*Editors Note - Alan Parks is originally from the UK and moved to Andalusia, Spain in 2008 to pursue his alpaca dream with his partner Lorna. He is the author of two books about their life, Seriously Mum, What's an Alpaca? and the sequel Seriously Mum, Where's that Donkey? Both books are available as ebooks, and as paperbacks from Amazon, Apple and elsewhere.*

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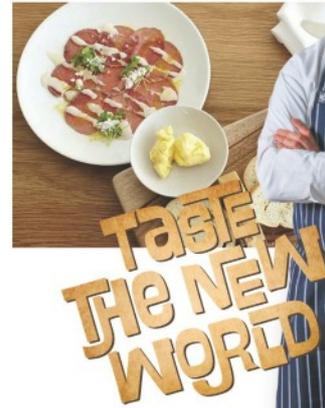
*"Growth of the alpaca meat industry means being able to acquire animals more often for market, which frees up some of the breeders' paddocks to then spend that money to buy better genetics and better stud animals to increase their herds"*

Ian Frith, CEO Illawarra Prime Alpaca

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# Royal Canberra Show 2014

By Susan Nielson - Convenor

## Royal Canberra Show 2014 - The Big Country Show - it keeps getting better!

Well 2014 at the Royal Canberra has rolled through and the weekend was once again a huge success. We had our regular exhibitors with a mix of new exhibitors all with happy faces, the venue was a huge success, the new layout in the shed worked like a dream. Maybe next year we will just copy this year. Entry numbers were good in animals a little low in fleeces but there is always next year, it would be great to hit 300 fleeces before I retire.

The judges Rick Hodgson and Ron Reid have been at Canberra with us before and they judged with their usual panache, at ease with their task and showing a great sense of humour. The standard was high and a few classes had them taking their time. Once again the professionalism the judge's display speaks highly of the AAA.

### **Supreme Champion Huacaya**

Grand Flowerdale Sherprince - Grand Flowerdale

### **Supreme Champion Suri**

Alabaster Skywalker- Alabaster

### **Best in colour- Huacaya**

Best in White - Grand Flowerdale Sherprince - Grand Flowerdale

Best in Light Fawn - Coolaroo Magic Ice - Coolaroo

Best in Med/Dark Fawn - Softfoot Perdita ET - Softfoot

Best in Brown - Softfoot Shenna MD - Softfoot

Best in Grey - Yaamba Shades of Grey - Bardella Park

Best in Black - Millpaca Maestro ET - Millpaca

### **Most Successful Huacaya Exhibitor award**

Softfoot Alpacas

### **Best In Colour - Suri**

(Suri is now at Canberra Royal to stay)

Best in White - Alabaster Skywalker - Alabaster

Best in Light Fawn - Baarrooka Shenandoah - Baarrooka

Best in Med/Dark Fawn - Azzura Zoom - Azzura

Best in Brown - Azzura Ken - Azzura

Best in Grey - Azzura Cruiser - Azzura

Best in Black - Azzura Ultimate Black Tiffman - Azzura

### **Most Successful Suri Exhibitor award**

Alabaster Alpacas



*Supreme Champion Huacaya - Grand Flowerdale Sherprince*



*Supreme Champion Suri - Alabaster Skywalker*



*Most Commercial Huacaya Fleece - Monga Khan - Monga Alpacas*

started and then seeing each years fleece, the improvements just keep on coming. Monga Alpacas did another first to my knowledge not only did they take out many ribbons and championships but their Supreme fleece was also the Most Commercial fleece, Monga Alpacas you are still setting the bar high for the rest of us.

**Supreme Champion Huacaya Fleece**

Monga Khan - Monga Alpacas

**Most Successful Huacaya Fleece Exhibitor**

Monga Alpacas

**Most Commercial Huacaya Fleece**

Monga Khan - Monga Alpacas

**Supreme Champion Suri Fleece**

Bumble Hill Teknik - Bumble Hill Alpacas

**Most Successful Suri Fleece Exhibitor**

Baarrooka Alpacas



*Ian Davison presents ribbon to Bob Kingwell - Monga Alpacas*

Natasha Clark was the fleece judge this year and the team enjoyed working with her. The team was excellent as always, the judging flowed smoothly, seeing the fleeces laid out on the tables for judging is a sight that continues to amaze me, the quality of fleece gets better every year. Thinking back to where we all

The 2014 RNCAS Alpaca Fleece Region of the year was won by the Southern Region NSW who received \$500.00 and an annual trophy. For the first time the South Australia region competed thanks to Softfoot Alpacas, and they came very close to beating the Southern Region. It would be great to see more regions competing, a way to see what each region is producing, so come on breeders next year at shearing have a look at your fleeces and think which ones should come to the RNCAS to compete.

We once again shared a marquee with the wool section, in this tent there was the Bringarum Alpaca Shop selling merchandise to the public, our Champion Fleece display and lastly Illawarra Prime Meat was back again this year to the publics delight. All potential aspects of the alpaca were on display. It was a huge success with the public lined up to get in.

Sponsors, volunteers and stewards are often forgotten behind the scenes. The sponsors help pay the bills, the stewards work hard for many days not just at the show. Without either of these people there would not be any show. At Canberra there is a small dedicated group of stewards without these people I would not be able to convene the show so a personal thanks to all of you, this year you all went over and beyond for me and it is very much appreciated. Included in that is the loyal sponsors who support every year, you people enable the show year after year.

I know I keep re-using the below paragraph each year I just can't come up with better words so here we go again! Exhibitors are the reason all the above effort is required, without you there simply would not be a show, some travel long hours, we all spend time halter training preparing our animals. While the ribbons we win are lovely, the opportunity to see other animals, see what other studs are producing, pine over the animal we would love to have bred, and catch up with friends old and new from other shows, adds to the draw of attending. So thank you exhibitors for making the effort, making the show what it is, and I hope to see you all again next year in 2015.

# Alpaca Immunoglobulins

By Dr Andrew Padula

Immunoglobulins, more commonly known as antibodies, are an essential molecule in the mammalian immune system.

This RIRDC funded project has explored the use of alpaca for the production of medical grade therapeutic antibody products. This report is a brief overview of the opportunities and processes involved in production of therapeutic antibodies.

All members of the camelid family have been shown to produce a unique class of immunoglobulin molecules in their blood stream (Hamers-Casterman *et al.* 1993). These molecules can be refined and harvested for production of specialised therapeutic medical products. The unique properties postulated for the camelid antibodies include reduced allergenic potential, greater heat stability and greater capacity for inactivating certain enzymes.

The use of alpaca for therapeutic antibody production has potential to create a high value niche market. This would expand the opportunities much further than the traditional meat and fibre markets. Australia is recognised internationally as one of the lowest disease risk countries in the world for producing products derived from animals. A low zoonotic disease risk is the essential basis of production of therapeutic antibodies. There are over 150,000 alpaca currently in Australia and prices per head have fallen to very affordable levels. Thus alpaca present an attractive proposition for production of medical grade therapeutic antibodies.

Therapeutic antibodies are molecules found in the bloodstream that can bind to, and inactivate, a wide range of chemical substances. There is a billion dollar global demand for therapeutic antibodies. A diverse range of medical products with well-defined markets already exists. Amongst these include various anti-toxin serums for snakes, spiders, bacterial infections (tetanus, rabies, botulism, anthrax), emerging anti-cancer therapies and a host of other applications. Currently these products are produced primarily in horses, sheep, rabbits and a small range of other animal species. Camelid antibodies have exciting potential to improve the quality of products available in this existing product marketplace.

The other substantial market for antibodies is in diagnostic test kits. Perhaps the most well-known of these, at the everyday consumer level, are human pregnancy tests available over the counter at chemists. The test is usually performed on urine samples. At the core of these simple immunological kits are antibodies that capture and bind the molecule of interest. For human pregnancy diagnosis the molecule associated with early

pregnancy is human chorionic gonadotrophin.

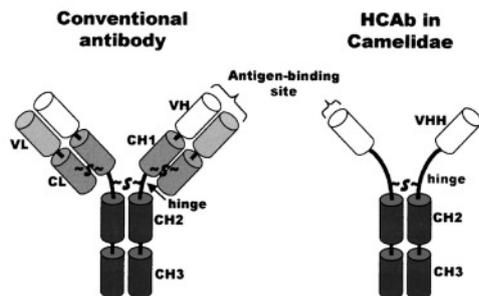
When the capture antibody in the test kit binds to the target molecule a colour change occurs in the test strip. The better the quality of the antibody the more sensitive and specific these tests can be made. The same principle is also used for many drug detection rapid tests. In fact the range of diseases and molecules that can be tested for is almost limitless. In parts of the world with malaria the rapid test kits are now widely used for diagnosing the condition. The market for rapid tests kits has expanded enormously in recent years. Typically rabbits, goats and chickens are used to make the antibodies. The alpaca has potential to replace those animals for commercial scale production.

The production of antibodies requires stimulating the immune system with the product (known as the antigen) that the antibodies are desired for. Artificially high levels of antibody result from this hyperimmunisation process. This process takes time for the animal's immune system to respond with high levels of specific antibody. Blood is then collected from the animal and processed to concentrate the specific antibody fraction.

The product is then tested for its potency and a range of other physiochemical parameters. Typically these products are final-packaged in sterile glass vials for human or veterinary medical use. Our work has shown that alpaca can respond to artificial hyperimmunisation regimes with similar responses to sheep, goats and horses. We have also demonstrated that serum can be repeatedly harvested from alpaca without harming the animal.



Figure 1. The author and assistant Allan Quirke harvesting whole blood from an alpaca under field conditions.



*Figure 3. Schematic representation of conventional antibody and naturally occurring heavy-chain antibody (HCAb) in Camelidae. The HCAb is smaller and shows more flexibility at a molecular level than the conventional antibody and is unique to camelids.*

We have also developed methods of monitoring the immune response in alpaca. Our results have shown that there is wide variation between alpaca in how they respond to immunisation. This presents an opportunity to screen animals and select the best responders to work with.

This project has specifically explored the potential for alpaca to make therapeutic antibodies against snake venom toxins. Snake venom toxins were chosen because, for an antibody to be truly effective, it must neutralise the actions of the venom. This provides a very robust demonstration (ie prevention of death in a mouse model) that all of the steps required to produce the neutralising antibody are working efficiently. Snake venom is a complex pharmacological substance with many different components.

This project has also examined the antibody response of alpaca to different venom components. Alpaca respond to venom immunisation with rapid development of neutralising antibodies. Extremely low doses of venom are used which do not harm the animals. The alpaca serum can be processed with modification to existing protocols used for other species. A very pure and concentrated antibody product is then produced from alpaca serum. When tested for venom neutralising capacity the experimental products were highly effective. However the serum processing appears to be less efficient than with other species, more work is required to optimise the methodology.

This project has demonstrated that alpaca can be used for efficient production of camelid- type antibodies. The abundance of alpaca in Australia and their affordable price presents many opportunities for using this species for antibody production. Therapeutic antibodies are a high value-niche market industry. Australia is placed very favourably in terms of low disease risks

for using alpaca to produce various antibody products for use in Australia and internationally. Aside from existing markets, new product applications are constantly emerging. This proof-of-concept study has demonstrated that alpaca can be used successfully to make traditionally difficult to make therapeutic antibody products. The next steps will require further investment to explore and expand into the various potential market opportunities.



*Figure 2. Freshly collected bag of alpaca blood ready for clotting and serum separation.*

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Hamers-Casterman, C., T. Atarhouch, S. Muyldermans, G. Robinson, C. Hamers, E. B. Songa, N. Bendahman and R. Hamers (1993). Naturally occurring antibodies devoid of light chains. *Nature* **363**(6428): 446-448.

*(Note - As presented at the AAA 2014 National Conference. Conference proceedings are available from the AAA online shop*

# In The Firing Line

By Debbie Redelman - Madisons Mountain Retreat

In October, 2013, we were in the firing line of the bushfires in the Blue Mountains outside Sydney.

We have a farmstay in Kurrajong Heights, but we live in Sydney and have managers on the property. Our managers took annual leave for 10 days, and left the property in the capable hands of a couple of relief managers. Both locals, they had insight into the community as well as experience on our property. I watched the fire threat reports, and kept our Facebook fans informed.

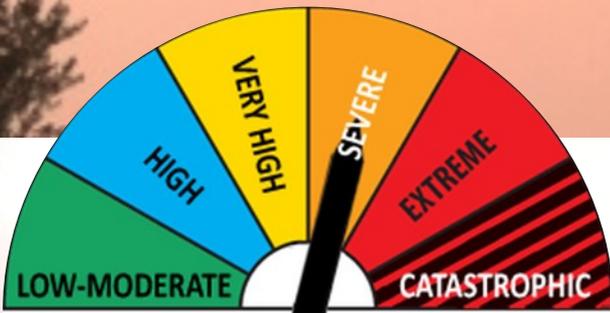
I watched the fire line progress toward our property. On the Wednesday, the relief manager, Jodi, emailed me to ask what our Bushfire Plan was. I emailed it back – our alpaca girls and bubs to go into the paddock with the dam (with the hope that they will keep wet and safe), and our boys and goats go on the concrete tennis court with a sprinkler over them. Evacuate all humans.

On the Thursday, she rang me to say that she could see plumes of smoke – and that she had moved the goats from the far paddock to a closer paddock in anticipation of evacuation. My husband, Geoff, rang the local Bush Fire Brigade who said that our property should be OK until Sunday. I kept watch on the Rural Fire Service website.

Jodi offered her property for evacuation of the animals. She was 15 mins closer to Sydney and had fenced paddocks (including one paddock with goat fencing) but only 3 horses. Her husband was head of the operations for the Blue Mountains Rural Bushfire Service. She had inside knowledge.

Sunday: We visited her property and I walked the paddocks to assess the weed, feed and water situation. All ok. She offered us her horse float and 4WD to transport the animals – and 2 of her teenage daughters volunteered to help. There are times in your life when it is clear that accepting offers is the right thing to do. I decided to EVACUATE.

We have our own covered box trailer and the other relief manager, David, was on the property. Between Geoff, myself, the two daughters, David, and two backpackers, I figured we had plenty of hands to move the animals. We started with the goats.



Already all in one paddock, I positioned the horse float at the gate, dropped the ramp and herded the goats. Goats don't herd. After getting most in with a bucket of feed, we loaded the rest one by one. We would surround a goat, catch it, and either feed it through the door of the float, resisting the rest that were trying to make a quick getaway, or over the top of the ramp with a catcher inside. Boy, it is hot inside a horse float with 30 goats and a raging bushfire approaching. One last goat, we were getting exhausted chasing it and the goat was getting very anxious. I called over our guests who were more than happy to help. We cornered the goat, and slowly moved toward it. Geoff grabbed it by the horns and I heard an echoing thud, the goat had butted him in the chest. I would have been thrown across the paddock I am sure.

Loaded up our sires into our box trailer and drove down the road.

Next load was our mums and bubs. I could see plumes of smoke in the distance and could smell it. We were doing the right thing. As we were loading up the horse float, another horse float drove into the property. I was worried as there were handwritten signs all around about thieves, so sent Geoff to investigate. It was a mother and daughter offering to help us with a load. People are so generous when you need them to be. It was the daughter's birthday and she was thrilled to touch an alpaca. Geoff sent one of Jodi's daughters in their car, in the hope that she will ensure that the car makes it to the other property, otherwise we could have had a horse float full of alpacas go missing.

We managed to get all the mums and bubs into the two trailers and the rest of our boys into the box trailer. We loaded up a few days of feed and buckets as well. I didn't think of taking our newborn cria kit. No one was due.

In the end, we moved all the animals off our property, over 50 alpacas and 30 goats, and it took us over 8 hours.

They back burnt overnight to 6km away, but after the experience in Victoria and Canberra – what is 6km worth?

Fine gave birth to Jersey on Monday – but Jersey wasn't due yet, he was very preemie. He was listless and didn't try to stand at all. Fine had blood on her back legs. We milked Fine, a maiden, and fed Jersey by syringe. We gave him extra water and electrolytes as it was very hot. We worked hard for a few days, but Jersey found it hard to stand and still wasn't feeding from Fine unless we attached him. We continued to milk Fine as well as attaching Jersey often. He was shivering so we had a little jacket on him (remember, it was extremely hot weather).

Tuesday night it sprinkled lightly and the fires were put out. Wednesday: wild hot winds and we were preparing to evacuate the new property. Ash and smoke all around. Fine started to reject Jersey. Jersey's ears became floppy.

I kept updating our Facebook page (you can read all about it even now), and the situation was looking pretty sad. Someone saw our plight and suggested Jersey needed the help of Dr Chris Brown, the Bondi Vet, who was looking for Bushfire affected patients. The call came at 9.30am Thursday, and I was in the east. I drove to the property to meet Chris' filming team at 1pm. It was a slow process. Jersey wasn't getting fluids and was deteriorating before our eyes. He was struggling to keep his head up.



*Dr Chris Brown, from the TV program 'Bondi Vet'*

We discussed Jersey's plight and Chris suggested a transfusion. I thought it would work as our vet had transfused one of our animals previously. They sent scouts out for supplies. We started to shave our wether's neck. We used horse clippers, hand held manual clipper, a razor, and he still had fleece on his neck! Chris successfully drew the blood and transfused it into Jersey. He started both Fine and Jersey on antibiotics. I have put the show on our Facebook page.

The improvement was instantaneous. Jersey jumped up and started to feed from Fine within minutes, and Fine no longer rejected him. How did she know? The team left at 9.30pm. Long day.

Sunday again, and we moved all the animals back on. Monday, Quest gave birth to Jordan but he was on time and doing well.

Wednesday, Geoff complained about his chest pain (again), so I told him to go to the doctor. The doctor told him to take pain killers and rest (yes, sure, I just have to move 80 animals!). On Friday, I sent Geoff back to the doctor who sent him for an X-ray and we found he had broken his sternum. So he had reason to whinge. His status was elevated from man-flu to serious injury.

An exhausting, hectic couple of weeks. It is now 5 months later. Jersey is developing well. He isn't a big boy, but his fleece is beautiful. He plays with all the other babies – especially at sunset, when they play.

We were in the firing line, and we all escaped – except for Geoff and that goat!

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# Diseases Of The Newborn Cria

## Part 1 - Dystocia & Critical Care

Professor Andrew Dart BVSc, PhD, Dip ECVS. Dip ACVS

### Introduction

The natural “fright and flight” reflex of undomesticated species is so important for survival in the wild. Over the years breeding of domesticated animals has selected for traits making them more suitable to human needs. Tolerance to human contact and temperament are important traits. South American Camelids still have this innate response to hide signs of disease as a protection, so they are less likely to be a target for predators. As a consequence, as owners and veterinarians became involved in animal health and husbandry of alpacas, SAC's were perceived to be very difficult to treat. The initial assumption was that alpacas were more susceptible to disease than domesticated species and less responsive to treatment. In fact the problem was that by the time animals demonstrated the overt signs of disease the disease state was so advanced treatment was unsuccessful.

Furthermore, the types of diseases affecting this unusual group of animals and our understanding of how to treat these diseases in alpacas remains largely empirical. So our understanding of the diagnosis and appropriate treatment options in an animal that was anatomically and functionally very different to known domesticated species further confused owners and veterinarians.

As we have gained more knowledge about SACs, both owners and veterinarians are more aware of the early and more subtle signs of disease so early intervention and a greater knowledge of the health problems has led to a rapid improvement in herd and individual animal management. Early recognition of problems and greater knowledge about treatment options has seen a rapid improvement in survival. In fact it would appear these animals are much more robust than most domesticated species.

Crias are not unlike adult alpacas in that they mask signs of disease. However, like all young animals their immune system is immature and their capacity to resist disease is limited. Early intervention before severe signs of disease become apparent is as an important aspect of treatment as the treatment itself.

An important point for all alpaca owners to understand is that none of the drugs used in veterinary medicine are registered for use in alpacas. Furthermore most of the techniques used to treat these animals are based on the experience in other species. Largely we know from experience most drugs we use in other species are safe in the alpaca, however there still needs to be research into how effective and at what dose rate these drugs should be used. Until this information is available and until the drugs are registered for use in the alpaca then they will be being used off label and at consequently at the owner's risk.

### Dystocia and Caesarean Section

Gestational length in alpacas ranges from 335-360 days. Parturition (birthing) in the alpaca is initiated by changes in circulating hormones and is divided into 3 stages as in other species. Stage one may take 2-6 hours and begins with relaxation of the cervix and uterine contractions which position the foetus at the birth canal. Stage two is expulsion of the foetus. This usually occurs in the morning with the dam in a standing position and, based on studies, should be completed in 8-25 minutes. Stage 3 is the expulsion of foetal membranes and should be completed in 3-4 hours but may be longer in alpacas having their first cria.

Imminent parturition in the alpaca is reported to be difficult to predict and signs consistent with impending parturition are often unreliable, particularly in first cria dams. Accurate breeding dates can be of assistance. Dystocia is defined as prolonged or difficult parturition. The prevalence of dystocia in SAC is reported to be 1.6-10% and lower than reported in other domestic ruminants. Maiden females make up only 25% of the dystocias seen in alpacas, in contrast to many other domestic species where it is most common in primiparous (first pregnancy) females. Malpositioning of the foetus caused by the long neck and legs of the cria or a failure of parturition to progress are common causes of dystocia. However there is little information on dystocia in this species.

The cervix is more susceptible to damage in SAC than other domestic species and damage to the cervix can lead to subsequent infertility. Furthermore prolonged manipulation carries the risk of injury to the dam, death of the foetus, and increased risk of postpartum metritis. Where the foetus cannot be delivered without undue risk to the dam or the cria or the cervix is not completely dilated and risks damage, caesarean section can be performed. It is prudent to set a strict time limit to



*Alpaca flank incision for caesarean*

manipulation of the foetus. It is all too common that manipulation is unintentionally prolonged compromising the delivery of a live cria and salvaging a reproductively sound dam. Caesarean should be considered a very effective treatment option.

Both ventral midline (through the abdomen) and paralumbar (through the flank) approaches have been suggested for caesarean section in alpacas. In domestic ruminants the paralumbar approach is often preferred for economic reasons and often because veterinarians are less comfortable with general anaesthesia in alpacas. However postoperative complications after paralumbar approaches are reported to be high and include sepsis wound complications and poor productivity and fertility. The ventral midline approach has been suggested as the preferred approach for caesarean section in the alpaca. This approach allows easy access to the abdominal cavity, provides good exposure with minimal haemorrhage, and the incision can be easily lengthened if needed. Aseptic atraumatic surgery is important to minimize risk of sepsis, wound infection and adhesions between the uterus and the surgical incision. Studies have shown complications are uncommon.

Future reproductive soundness is more likely after a ventral midline approach compared to a paralumbar approach. Paralumbar approaches may be preferred for economic reasons in low value animals where future reproductive performance is not a priority.

After caesarean section, alpacas will tend to retain the foetal membranes longer than after normal delivery. Oxytocin can be used to help promote involution (shrinkage) of the uterus after birth and promote membranes to be discharged. However excessive oxytocin use is unnecessary and can lead to abdominal pain and uterine prolapse. In our experience after caesarean section, membranes are often retained for 2-3 days before expulsion with or without oxytocin therapy. Infection and sepsis are not common with retained membranes in alpacas but most females subjected to caesarean section are on antimicrobial therapy.

### **Critical Care in the Dysmature Cria**

Generally the newborn is between 6-10 kg. Higher birth weights in this country compared to Peru are probably associated with the females being in better condition. Generally gestation length in females is similar from year to year so keeping records on breeding dates and birthing dates are useful so the owner can be aware of impending births. Dysmature crias do occur. These crias may be born during the suggested time for normal gestation however may not, for a variety of reasons have undergone their full development inside the uterus. Generally these crias have lower birth weights, un-erupted incisors, floppy ears and a silky coat. They are often weak and find it difficult to stand and nurse.

There can be a tendency for owners to interfere with the natural process of birth and the subsequent period of bonding between dam and cria. To put this into perspective for those owners who wish to be part of this process, animals gave birth for thousands of years without the need for human intervention. For those who argue that many newborns are saved by simple intervention that might otherwise lead to the death of the newborn it is impossible to know how many deaths are caused by unnecessary intervention interfering with the natural process. Human intervention should be from a safe distance, reserved for when it



*Uterus stitched after caesarean*

is clear it is needed and efficient and unobtrusive.

Alpacas should be provided with a clean protected paddock around the time of birth. Once the cria is born it is important to allow the dam and cria to bond. Many books recommend dipping the umbilical stump in antiseptics such as 2 or 3% iodine. This is unlikely to make a substantial difference to infection rates provided the environment is clean. The umbilicus can be briefly inspected for excessive bleeding. If the bleeding is substantial then 10-25 minutes of pressure or a ligature around the umbilicus will usually be sufficient to stop the bleeding.

Crias have a poorly developed immune system and rely on transfer of immunity in the colostrum or mothers milk. This transfer must occur within the first 24 hours and preferably in the first 8-12 hours. After this time the ability to absorb large proteins diminishes. There are a number of tests that can be performed to assess the efficacy of this transfer however in this country simply doing a serum protein reading on a refractometer which most veterinary practices have on site will provide a reasonable measure of colostrums absorption. The importance of colostrum to provide immunity for the first three months until the neonatal immune system develops should not be underestimated. However it has been established that crias that have good colostrum transfer and are exposed to unclean environments are susceptible to disease and those that do not get good transfer and are kept in clean environments may survive quite comfortably. So the importance of providing hygienic and clean paddocks for birth and the neonatal period should not be underestimated.

Young crias that are dysmature or are weak at birth and are not nursing, need early intervention. We have found that these crias can survive on short term energy reserves and appear quite bright for about 24 hours. This can provide a false sense of security to owners. If these crias are not nursing adequately and do not receive appropriate nutrition, they invariably have poorly developed organ function and will suddenly go from appearing to be relatively normal to collapse into a semi-comatose condition. On most occasions treatment at this time is unsuccessful. Early intervention to provide nutritional support for these crias until they are able to fend for themselves is usually successful.

Many owners will try and provide support for weak or dysmature crias to avoid the costs of veterinary treatment. Crias require at least 100 ml/kg of body weight (800-1600 ml) of fluid and an energy source in the first 24 hours. Where organs such as the intestinal tract are not fully mature administering this volume orally may overload the cria. If the cria is not readily prepared to drink this volume, or administration of this volume is not achievable at home, veterinary assistance is warranted.

The approach we have developed over the years using knowledge from other species and by trial and error in alpacas is highly successful. It involves hospitalisation of the cria with the mother, administration of antibiotic cover, insertion of a feeding tube and administration of milk replacer, provision of plasma as a source of antibodies, and intravenous access for fluid and antimicrobial therapy. Even if the mother has little milk or stops lactating, as the cria becomes stronger, the dam will begin to increase or resume lactation.

Appropriate antibiotics for use in alpacas, particularly crias, is unknown. It is best to use routes of administration and antibiotics that are the simplest and most reliable across species. While intramuscular and subcutaneous administration is convenient it provides less reliable and lower concentrations of antibiotics than intravenous approaches. Oral antimicrobials potentially can cause diarrhoea and absorption may be variable. Placement of an intravenous catheter is simple and practical and also provides a route for administration of intravenous fluids if required. Antimicrobials such as Ceftiofur or Pencillins combined with Gentamicin are appropriate and doses used in other species appear to be effective.

Small feeding tubes used for human babies are appropriate in size for crias. These soft silicone tubes can be passed through the nose into the oesophagus and fixed in place with some sutures through the nostril. The tube should not be passed into the stomach and should end in the oesophagus as it enters the chest. This distance can easily be estimated by placing the tube beside the cria before passing it. This is an ideal way to ensure the cria gets the appropriate volume of fluid in divided doses in a manageable way and is the most critical aspect of giving these crias the right start. The cria does not resent this tube and will nurse from the dam or the bottle while the tube is in place. We usually use Divetalact which is a commercial milk replacer appropriate for crias. We calculate the daily fluid requirement (100ml/kg body weight). Where crias are clearly dysmature we make up a half strength solution of divetalact giving small volumes (20-30 ml) every 2 hours for the first 12 hours to see if the gastrointestinal tract is mature enough to handle solid fluids.

The remaining daily volume of fluid is given intravenously in divided doses so that the cria is receiving about 1.5 times its daily requirement. Glucose can be added to these intravenous fluids to make up a 5% solution. Excess fluid will be urinated out and support kidney function. If the cria is able to handle the milk replacer we increase the frequency and volumes of the feeds to a 10% solution and reduce the intravenous fluid supplements. Once the cria is stronger it will begin to nurse at which time we gradually reduce the supplementation.

Crias require the antibodies in colostrum to provide resistance to disease in the first 3 months of life. Gradually the crias immune system will develop and produce its own antibodies during the first 3 months. If the cria does not receive colostrum then this source of antibodies needs to be supplemented. Colostral



*Cria with feeding tube*

antibodies can only be absorbed during the first 24 hours of life. If the cria does not receive colostrum it should be replaced by administration of commercial plasma. Plasma is rich in antibodies. It is best given intravenously but has been administered orally (in the first 24 hours) or into the abdominal cavity. An alternative approach to using commercial plasma, although not as effective, is to collect blood from the dam and hang the blood bag in the fridge. The cria can be given 50 ml of whole blood then 25 ml twice a day intravenously over 3- 4 days. Over several days the red blood cells will settle to the bottom of the bag and the plasma will settle on the top so the plasma can be selectively collected and administered. The efficacy of this approach can be measured by measuring the increase in the total protein in the cria's blood.

Crias generally respond well to this treatment. The aim of treatment is to be minimally invasive and coordinate treatments to occur at the same time so as to minimize stress. Crias will respond in their own time and should be given time to rest and for body systems to mature and adjust to the environment outside the uterus. Most crias will be ambulatory and self sufficient by 1-4 days.

Early intervention is the key to successful treatment in alpacas. Delaying intervention can provide a false sense of security because alpacas are so adept at masking signs of deterioration. The end result is that the onset of clinical signs of deterioration is usually rapid and invariably terminal. Setting realistic time frames to supportive therapy or intervention at home after which time, if there is no appreciable improvement, contacting a suitably experienced veterinarian is prudent. Good management practices should not be underestimated as very effective in preventing stock loss.

On that basis I believe we should not be overly concerned about the higher incidence of the abnormalities compared to the more domesticated herd species and allow nature to take its course.

*To be continued in Issue 73*

# Alpaca Week 2014



## QLD Breeder

Green green grass communications organised an article on the children's activities and events website - [www.brisbanekids.com.au](http://www.brisbanekids.com.au) and many parents bought their families out to enjoy the activities at Paltarra Park! Colouring in and glueing fleece onto alpaca outlines to make your own coloured alpaca and oohing and aahing over two very new cria were the popular activities.



## WA Breeder

In WA, new AAA breeders Mike And Lesley Owen were well rewarded for presenting their Silver Karri Stud with the added touch of local produce and wild flowers. Visitors came and they bought – alpaca.

"Some could not resist the breeding packages and bought them all - 2 mothers and sons and a third female"

*Lesley Owen, Silver Karri Alpacas*



## SA Breeder

Miranda 11 years old and Patrick 6 years old, came to visit Cynthia and Derrick Hall of Somadale Alpacas SA & Miranda sent them this email.

"We came to see the alpacas at your farm & we just wanted to say a big thank you for the experience with Winston, it's not everyday you get the opportunity to walk an alpaca! We really enjoyed talking about the alpacas on your farm and they are truly fascinating. One quick question? How on earth do you remember all 79 alpaca names? Is it hard?"

# "Australian Alpaca Consolidates for the future" - Federal Agriculture Minister - Barnaby Joyce

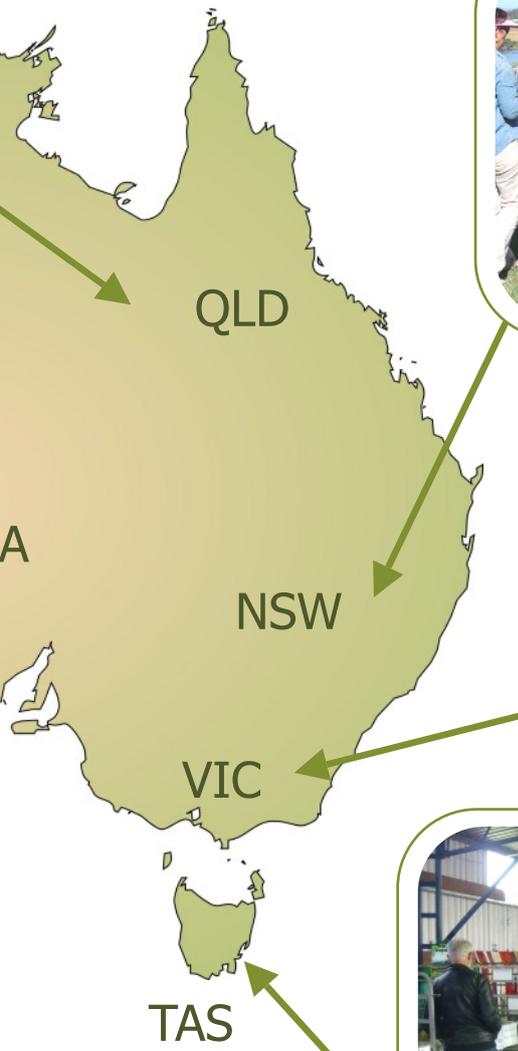
The launch of Australian Alpaca Week 2014 took the industry to the doorstep of Federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce and his influential parliamentary colleagues. In a campaign created by green, green grass communications for the AAA, federal ministers took to Facebook and Twitter, leading their thousands of influential followers to help name some of our newest born champions in support of Australian Alpaca Week.

A delegation of cria arrived in Canberra, to give special alpaca thanks to the ministers for their generous support. Parliamentarians and media gathered for a wet and windy briefing, where the Minister for Agriculture declared the future of the Australian Alpaca industry to be as marvellous as the textile it produces.

Almost a hundred farms around Australia were primed and open for visitors, and reports of great success are still coming in. Many breeders showed their fabulous herding instincts and worked together to draw bigger crowds.



*Photograph courtesy of Joanne Gower*



## NSW Breeders



Nattameri (Bob & Jackie Coxon) and Wahgungurry (Pauline & Colin Glasser) alpaca studs joined to open for a Sunday during alpaca week. After some good local media promotion and printing and delivering postcards advertising the day they were ready to go. After a very stormy quiet morning the sun appeared and over 70 people turned up for tea and scones and to enjoy everything alpaca in a very beautiful setting.

## VIC Breeders



On the Bellarine Peninsula in Victoria, Jan Laity of Park View Alpacas and Cath, Brendon and Dominic Lukin of Piazzola Park introduced Suri and Huacaya at the Werribee Animal Expo. "The media coverage and support materials were excellent and we would like to encourage members to consider hosting events next year to take advantage of this fine opportunity to promote the industry." - Cath Lukin

## TAS Breeders



In Northern Tasmania, 12 alpaca farms and their passionate breeders came together for the Deloraine Alpaca Expo introducing a little of everything about alpaca farming and its diversity.

"It was a wonderful experience and augers well for 2015." Mark Saunders, Yimarra Farm

Alison Brolsma of Wharncliffe Alpacas near Hobart taught visitors the difference between Suri and Huacaya products.

# Suri Fibre

## Lessons from “Surissimo”, “Rumplestiltskin”... and the wine industry

By Fiona Vanderbeek, Birrong Suri Alpacas & Alcazar Suri Stud

Anyone who has seen and felt the fleece of a top quality suri is blown away by its unique qualities of lustre and silky, slippery handle – what we often hear referred to as the “WOW factor” of suri.

Why then, more than twenty years after this rarer type of alpaca first arrived in Australia, are we still grappling with converting this magnificent raw fibre into an equally sumptuous fabric? This article gives a brief overview of two suri processing trials, and considers some key messages to help take us forward, including some lessons from the wine industry.

### The “Surissimo” Project

In the early days of the Australian suri, it was often said that suri simply could not be processed; it was thanks to Julienne Gelber of Bumble Hill Alpacas, and some like-minded suri breeders in New Zealand, that this myth was finally debunked. It took Julienne fourteen years from the time she first set eyes on the silken locks of a suri at sunset, to the achievement of her dream. Using her wool and textiles background to understand what high-end processing would demand of the fibre, she embarked on a ten-year breeding program with the objective of producing a luxurious, lustrous suri fibre full of drape and with exquisite handle.

Working with breeders in New Zealand, an approach was made to the government’s experimental mill at Lincoln University (at the time called WRONZ and later renamed AgResearch) to produce a sample range of high quality/high value 100% suri woven fabrics which would exhibit the natural lustre and soft handle of the suri fibre. It took two years to convince the mill’s technical team that the project was feasible, as they initially believed the micron range proposed (20-22 micron) was too fine and that the fibre available would lack sufficient uniformity. Working with like-minded breeders in Australia and New Zealand, genetics were further refined to produce a style of suri that had the desired fibre characteristics, together with husbandry and classing modifications which ultimately produced a fibre that was shorter, had a tighter micron range and lower SD of length, with classing selecting only the softest and most lustrous fleeces. By 2007 the research team were won over by the quality, and the breeders were able to provide sufficient quantity, of raw fibre for the trial to commence.

The end result of this trial, in 2010, was six fully finished fabric pieces, in a variety of finishes, but all of which exhibited the high lustre and glossy, sleek handle unique to suri. Despite their initial scepticism, the mill’s technicians had encountered no significant problems in the way the suri fibre had scoured, gilled and converted to yarn, and there were also no issues with the weaving process.

The twelve years’ work behind this achievement adopted an integrated approach including genetics (to select and breed animals with the desired fleece characteristics), management practices (such as time of shearing to achieve desired fleece length), nutrition and farm environment (to ensure fibre is harvested in peak condition) and a total quality management approach from farm to mill.



### The “Rumplestiltskin” Trial

In 2012 two breeders in New Zealand received a grant from the Sustainable Farming Fund to undertake more research into the commercial processing options for suri. Unfortunately the AgResearch facility previously used by Surissimo had been closed and alternative commercial processors needed to be found. The approach taken this time was a little different in that fleeces were sourced from breeders across New Zealand and, when additional quantities were required, Australian breeders were invited to join the project. The involvement of Australian suri breeders was initially spearheaded by Paul Valley of Australian Alpaca Fibre Testing, who asked me to assist him in co-ordinating the collection of suri fibre on this side of the Tasman.

In 2012/13 the focus was on collecting a sufficient quantity of white suri fibre, with a micron range of 22-23.9, SD of <5.0 and length between 80-140mm. These were the stipulated requirements of the trial's processor, who need uniformity of micron and length for successful processing. A nationwide call for suri fibre that met the requirements yielded a bale of 110kg which was exported to New Zealand in March 2013.

The fibre was scoured in July 2013; the normal speed of the scour is 500kg per six minutes, which had to be slowed to a minimum to deal with the small batch of around 170kg of suri. This stage of the process highlighted the absolute importance of fibre length, as over-length fibre tangles in the machinery. The next stages are carding, combing and gilling into tops, before spinning into yarn. In New Zealand, as in Australia, many mills have closed in recent years and the machinery been sold overseas or scrapped. It has therefore taken longer than hoped to find a mill keen to work with suri and with the necessary expertise to take the fibre through to yarn. In March 2014 a commercial mill (Design Spun) was finally identified and the fibre will be processed into a worsted yarn with capability for both knitting and weaving.

Here in Australia we have continued to collect fleece, with the 2013/14 fibre criteria being extended, to include three micron ranges (<19; 19-21.9; 22-23.9) and some colours (white; light fawn; medium fawn; black). A SD <5.0 (or 5.5 for black) and length between 80-140mm are still critical. Fleece collection/baling days have been designed to be educational in an effort to drive continuous improvement in the quality of fleeces being put forward for processing and collection days have so far been held in Victoria and NSW.

From two collection days, held in Victoria and Southern NSW, a total of 112 fleeces (83.2kg) were baled, with the distribution across lines and colours shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Victoria and SNSW Baling days

Colour	White	Light Fawn	Medium Fawn	Bay Black & True Black
<b>Number of fleeces &lt;19 Micron</b>	17	NIL	NIL	NIL
<b>Number of fleeces 19 - 21.9 Micron</b>	44	1	8	1
<b>Number of fleeces 22- 23.9 Micron</b>	32	2	3	1

A total of 211 fleeces were brought to the two baling days, of which 99 did not make the grade. An analysis of the reasons why fleeces submitted (which had met the initial micron/SD criteria based on a midside sample) did not make the grade is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Reasons for rejection: Victoria and SNSW Baling days

Reason	Number	Percentage
<b>Length (too long/too variable)</b>	32	32%
<b>3-point FD too high</b>	20	20%
<b>3-point SD too high</b>	18	18%
<b>3-point FD and SD too high</b>	13	13%
<b>Tender</b>	6	6%
<b>Coarse fibre contamination</b>	5	5%
<b>Colour contamination</b>	1	1%
<b>VM/Stain</b>	1	1%
<b>Other</b>	3	3%



### Key Learning Points from: Surissimo, Rumblestiltskin and the *wine industry*

While helping neighbours pick their shiraz I was considering what we have already learned from these two fibre processing projects... and was suddenly struck by the similarity between what would seem two entirely different rural industries – suri fibre and wine grapes. There is much we can learn from an industry that has already faced many of the challenges we are now dealing with.



## 1. Herd Management

Perhaps the most important lesson learned to date is the importance of *fleece length*. For successful commercial processing fleece needs to be between 80-140mm in length. If this is what the processors want, then this is what the grower must provide. To ensure that fleeces are not over-length, breeders may need to consider changes to their birthing or shearing programs.

*In the wine industry grapes are picked when they achieve the correct sugar content to maximise the quality of the wine. Too early or too late and the vintage will be ruined.*

*Excessive vegetable matter (VM) or cotted fleeces* can also be minimised by consideration of time of shearing (ideally before seed-set on grasses) and by paddock maintenance – control of weeds with burrs, annual grasses such as barley grass etc. Shearing of cria with very fine fleeces will often save a fleece which would otherwise become contaminated and cotted – regrowth fleeces are generally easier to keep free of excessive VM.

## 2. Management at shearing

Management at the time of shearing is of critical importance in maximising the value of fleece. Always *shear white animals first* and progress through the colours from lighter to darker shades. Be absolutely sure the floor is swept clean between animals, particularly when moving to a darker colour. Also ensure there is no possibility of fibre contamination in the area of the fleece skirting table. The contamination of a white fleece with even a couple of coloured fibres will render it almost worthless.

Consider modifications to *shearing technique* – such as “saddle first” – to minimise the risk of coarse fibres contaminating the prime saddle area of the fleece. Whatever shearing technique is used, ensure that the hairiest parts of the fleece (belly and lower legs) are removed on the shearing floor and separated from the saddle before it is taken to the skirting table.

Ensure that a suitably trained and competent person has responsibility for skirting each fleece as it is placed on the skirting table. An initial, thorough skirting must take place at shearing to avoid contamination of the fleece with coarse fibres. Areas of the fleece that are heavily contaminated with VM should be totally removed; the occasional small pieces of VM will be removed in the scouring process. *Never place a fleece in a bag unskirted* – once the coarse edge fibres have contaminated the prime saddle fleece they can never be removed.

*Our strict instructions when picking this year's shiraz were to harvest slowly and carefully, leaving behind any grapes that were shrivelled or unripe (due to an extremely hot, dry summer) and at all costs to avoid those with botrytis (a fungus growing on grapes that had recently been subjected to high rainfall and humidity). The inclusion of even a small number of botrytis-affected grapes would have ruined the entire harvest. As the vineyard owner stressed – he would rather have one tonne of top quality grapes than twice the quantity of spoilt fruit.*

## 3. Breeding program

While some issues in producing top quality suri fibre for processing can be relatively simply remedied by modifications to herd management and shearing, there are other critical factors which can only be improved by longer term measures to modify the fleece qualities within a herd. The “Surissimo” project was the result of twelve years of selective breeding to produce the desired style of fleece.

Lustre and handle are of paramount importance.

Fibre diameter (micron) is critical to maximising fleece value. Whilst it does not necessarily need to be ultrafine, like other natural fibres coarse fleece is not going to have value to the top-end processor.

Uniformity is often overlooked by breeders. Standard deviation (SD) – which is a measure of the uniformity of the fleece – is at least as important, if not more important, than fibre diameter. Fleeces which have coarse fibres scattered throughout them will have a higher SD and are not desirable for high-end commercial processing.

Style is also important in producing fleeces which remain well-aligned and avoid coting both on the animal and during processing. A flatter style of lock is considered preferable to the older style of tightly twisted lock, which do not go through a scour as well (tightly twisted locks will tend to fall through the machinery and cause excessive wastage). Some wave along the lock also helps to maintain the fibres in alignment.

Density is obviously important to maximise the quantity of useable fleece cut from each animal. A dense, solid structure to each lock is also helpful in repelling VM and reducing coting of the fibre.

A breeding program to produce top quality fibre producing suri must involve a constant cycle of breeding, evaluation, record-keeping and culling to drive the quality of suri higher.

*Our neighbour's vineyard used to grow two grape varieties, one consistently underperformed, they removed them and focussed on the top-performing variety.*

### Where to from here?

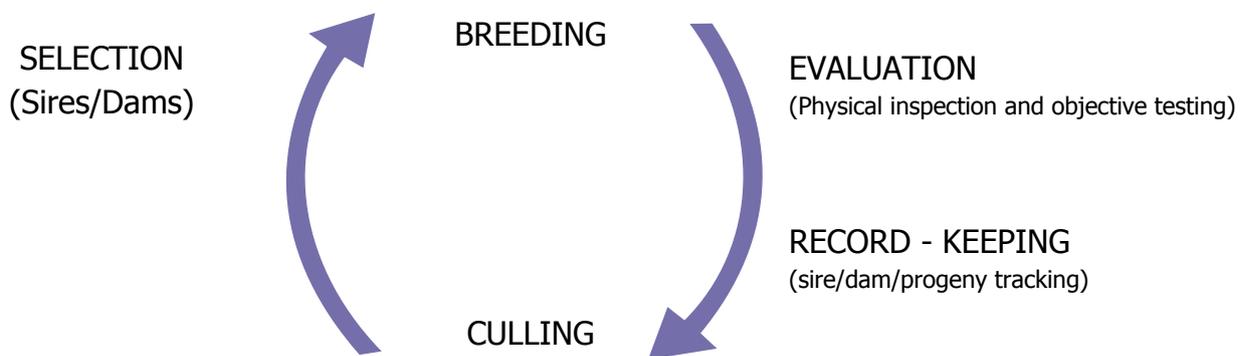
A group of eight suri breeders, all with a passion for suri fibre, and spread geographically across Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, met for the first time in March 2014, when Paul Vallely decided the time had come for him to withdraw and focus on his own business interests.

With the over-arching focus being "suri fibre", the team has started work under the title of the "Suri Fibre Development Group" and will initially focus attention on one or two challenging,

but achievable, goals – such as a system to collect and class suri fibre, and liaison with potential processing partners.

As suri owners we are privileged to be in possession of an animal with the potential to produce a luxurious and sought after rare natural fibre, albeit also a fibre with some inherent processing challenges. An integrated approach to quality – encompassing genetics, animal selection and culling, together with high standards of farm management, husbandry and fibre harvesting – is critical. If suri breeders can work collaboratively and have a real desire to drive the quality of their fibre higher, and if commercial partners prepared to work with suri can be identified, then the future for the suri industry remains bright.

*(Note - As presented at the AAA 2014 National Conference. Conference proceedings are available from the AAA online shop)*



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By Charlie Bell

# Pasture Establishment & Management

Part 2

## Pasture Establishment Techniques

Pastures can be established using a range of methods all of which can be effective if applied carefully.

### 'Conventional' fully cultivated seedbed

This involves preparation of a cultivated seedbed where all existing vegetation is removed and the soil is worked down into a fine 'tilth'. This can be achieved using a range of different implements such as disc ploughs, tine cultivators or rotary hoes. This technique is generally harmful to soil structure and should be totally avoided on some soil types. Full cultivation will, however, produce good results and can be effectively used where appropriate.

### Minimum Tillage

This technique involves a combination of cultivation and use of herbicides, grazing or perhaps even burning to achieve weed control. The reduced tillage results in less soil damage but requires the use of alternative methods to control weeds. Minimum tillage is becoming very popular in grain growing areas for crop establishment.

### Direct Drilling

Direct drilling involves the use of a specialised seeding machine which is capable of placing the seed accurately into uncultivated soil. Weed control is achieved by herbicides, grazing and burning. Direct drilling is the least damaging to the soil and is the best method to use where there is a danger of soil erosion. Direct drilling is now also much cheaper than cultivation due to the escalating costs of fuel and machinery and the relative fall in the price of herbicides.

### Broadcast Seeding

This method involves the spreading of the seed and fertiliser on the surface using a fertiliser spreader or even by hand in small areas. Broadcasting seed in the surface does not put the seed directly in contact with the soil and requires good moisture conditions at seeding of follow up rain to be effective. Excellent results can be achieved with broadcasting if conditions are right.

### Aerial Seeding

This is similar to broadcast seeding but the seed is spread by plane rather than ground rig. This technique is applicable for steeper, inaccessible land which cannot be covered by a tractor. It is also useful for very large scale planting. Timing, preparation and moisture conditions are crucial for success.

## The Process Of Establishing Pasture

The following is a brief outline of the operations and management that should be undertaken to ensure the effective establishment of a new pasture. While these are only the basics, there are many excellent sources of information and advice available.

### Establishing a new pasture

#### 1. Soil preparation

Some cultivation of the soil prior to seeding may be required even if using a broadcasting or direct drill technique. Cultivation may be needed to clean up and level the land; to aerate the soil with a sub soiler to break up compaction or hard pans; to incorporate lime to treat acidity or gypsum on some clay soils to improve structure.

#### 2. Weed control

Attempting to establish a new pasture without effective weed control will usually result in an expensive failure. Some options for weed control are:

- Cultivation;
- Heavy grazing;
- Spraying with herbicides;
- Slashing;
- Burning
- A combination of the above.



## 1. Timing

Seeding should be timed to coincide with the most favourable seasonal conditions. In most areas, autumn seeding is most effective. Seeding in spring can be risky if hot dry conditions follow. Preparation and planning will allow you to make the best use of available moisture after rain by seeding into moist soil.

## 2. Seed

Use certified seed which is guaranteed to meet a minimum standard germination percentage; and to be free of weed seeds and impurities. Use the recommended seeding rate as this will result in the best establishment. Correct plant population will help the newly established pasture compete with weeds.

Be sure to inoculate legume seed (Clovers, Lucerne, etc) with the correct strain of Rhizobia bacteria. Failure to inoculate could lead to a poor pasture. The seed supplier should supply the correct inoculant.

## 3. Seed placement

Placement of the seed is critical for successful germination. Seed is best covered and in contact with moist soil. This is obviously not possible with broadcast or aerial seeding so moisture conditions are even more critical. If using a seed drill, seed should not be placed any deeper than is necessary to contact the soil moisture.

## 4. Ensure adequate nutrition

In most cases when seeding new pastures, fertiliser of some kind is applied to boost growth. Young plants, especially, need good nutrition. The need for fertiliser can be assessed in a number of ways:

- Paddock history;
- The vigour of existing vegetation;
- Chemical soil tests;
- Trial plots.

## 5. Weed and insect pest control

Effective weed and insect control can be the difference between a profit and disaster. Good weed control before seeding will give the emerging seedlings a good start. Certified seed, adequate fertility, correct seeding rates and placement of seed will put the odds in your favour for good germination and emergence. However, management practices after emergence are just as important. Inspection of the new pasture should be done regularly to check for weed growth and you should also be on the lookout for insects. If a problem emerges you have a number of options open to you:

- Using a selective herbicide to kill weeds;
- Strategic grazing or slashing can help reduce weed growth;
- Applying fertiliser may help in some situations.

The following will help prevent or eliminate insects:

- Grow species or varieties which are resistant to common pests in your area;

- Use treated seed;
- Spray only if absolutely necessary.

## 6. Use of Fertiliser

Maintaining good nutrition is important for sustained production. All crop and pastures can benefit in some situations from additional fertiliser after seeding. Fertiliser can be added in many forms.

## 7. Grazing the new pasture

New pastures usually stand only light grazing in the first season. The following are some important points to remember:

- Graze only when plants cannot be pulled out;
- Graze heavily for short periods to remove weeds;
- Some species need to set seed each year to replenish root reserves;
- Allow plenty of time for the pasture to recover after grazing.

Successful pasture establishment – a summary.

- Good planning: done well in advance of the seeding operation. In many cases preparation should begin 12 months before you plan to seed.
- Preparation: should be thorough to ensure the new seedlings have the best chance for survival. Young pasture seedling are delicate and need everything in their favour to establish effectively.
- Fertility: addition of the correct type and amount of fertiliser will give new pasture the best chance.
- Careful seeding: under the right soil and moisture conditions.
- Control of weeds, insects and disease after establishment.
- Careful grazing management of the newly established pasture.

## Grazing Management Strategies

How should pastures be managed to ensure good nutrition and pasture persistence?

There are many different opinions on how this can be achieved. These range between the two extremes:

- *Set stocking systems* where the pasture is grazed most of the time and the animals are solely responsible for regulating their grazing; and
- *Controlled grazing systems* where the animals are rotated around a series of paddocks according to a planned grazing schedule.

The system you choose on your farm will depend mainly on your goals. I believe most farms would benefit from some type of rotational grazing.

There are a few basic principles for rotational grazing that need to be adhered to in all circumstances but the application of these principles will vary. These principles are as follows:

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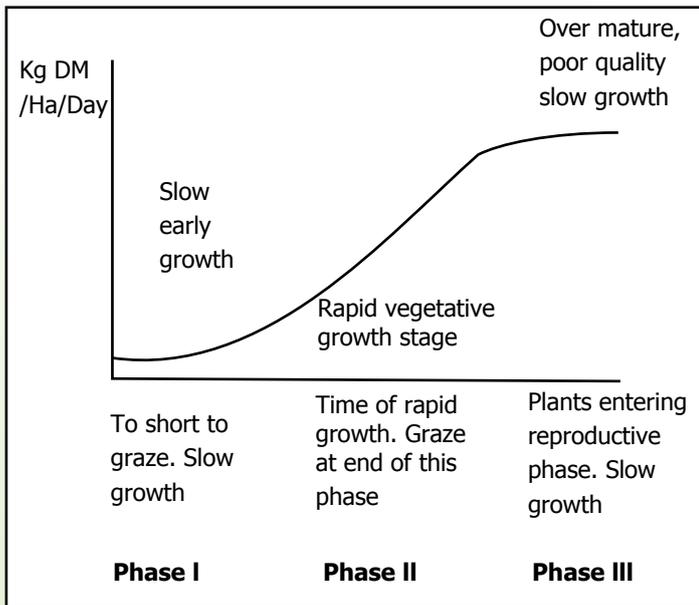
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**1. Ensure that the plants are actively growing as much as possible and avoid senescence to achieve the maximum annual production**

All pastures follow a growth curve similar to the one illustrated (see above).

To obtain maximum production and encourage a vigorous pasture which will persist from year to year, grazing should take place mainly towards the end of Phase II on the growth curve illustrated above. Grazing too early will weaken the pasture and grazing too late will result in poor quality feed and reduced animal performance.

**2. Apply grazing pressure strategically to control the species makeup of the pasture**

To manage this effectively you will need to have a good understanding of the growth cycles of the different species present. The balance of different species can be manipulated by hard grazing at specific times and resting at others.

**3. Control weeds**

Weeds often have a competitive advantage in a set stocking system as they are generally not grazed by stock as much as the adjacent pasture plants that are grazed heavily and continuously. Weeds will thus be able to out-compete the desirable species as they are not being regularly defoliated. Over time the weeds will dominate. Grazing pressure can be applied strategically in a rotational system to ensure that the weeds get eaten out along with the pasture plants. They will therefore not have the competitive advantage and will be shaded out by vigorous pasture regrowth.

**4. Maintain livestock nutrition at a level sufficient to achieve production goals**

The biggest challenge in a rotational grazing system is to balance the pasture management objectives with animal performance. It is easy to concentrate on applying grazing pressure to manipulate pastures and weeds while neglecting the nutrition of animals.

This is particularly important with cattle that require plentiful feed on offer to achieve good growth rates of milk production.

Developing this balance between pasture management and animal performance is a real challenge and usually a matter of trial and error to develop a system on your own farm. It is essential to have a means of monitoring animal performance on a regular basis to know how your system is working.

**5. Maintain livestock health (reduce parasite burdens)**

Livestock health and control of parasites will usually be improved using a rotational grazing system. If stock are moving to fresh pastures on a regular basis there is less re-infection by internal and external parasites. Well fed animals with a good variety in their diet will always be more healthy.

**Conclusion**

In this paper I have attempted to give an overview of some of the issues that affect pasture production. Much of it is very general and not at all specific to alpacas.

Pastures for alpaca production have been studied very little in Australia. Consequently, there is a lack of specific information. This should not be a major problem and should not limit the development of the industry.

I believe there is a tremendous amount of knowledge accumulating among alpaca growers in all areas of Australia. The challenge to the industry is to ensure that this information is recorded and shared among all growers. For this reason, I think it important that growers start to observe and think critically about what is happening with pastures on their farms and discuss this with other growers. This same process of forming discussion groups has led to tremendous improvements in skills and knowledge in other industries and should work equally well in the alpaca industry.

Pasture management is a complex mixture of science and art. Pastures are extremely complex biological systems, subject to many different forces that constantly change with the seasons. In most areas of Australia we also have droughts and the occasional flood with which to contend. The pasture manager has to manage all this complexity and harness it to help achieve his/her goals. In dealing with complexity a group working together will be far more effective than individuals.

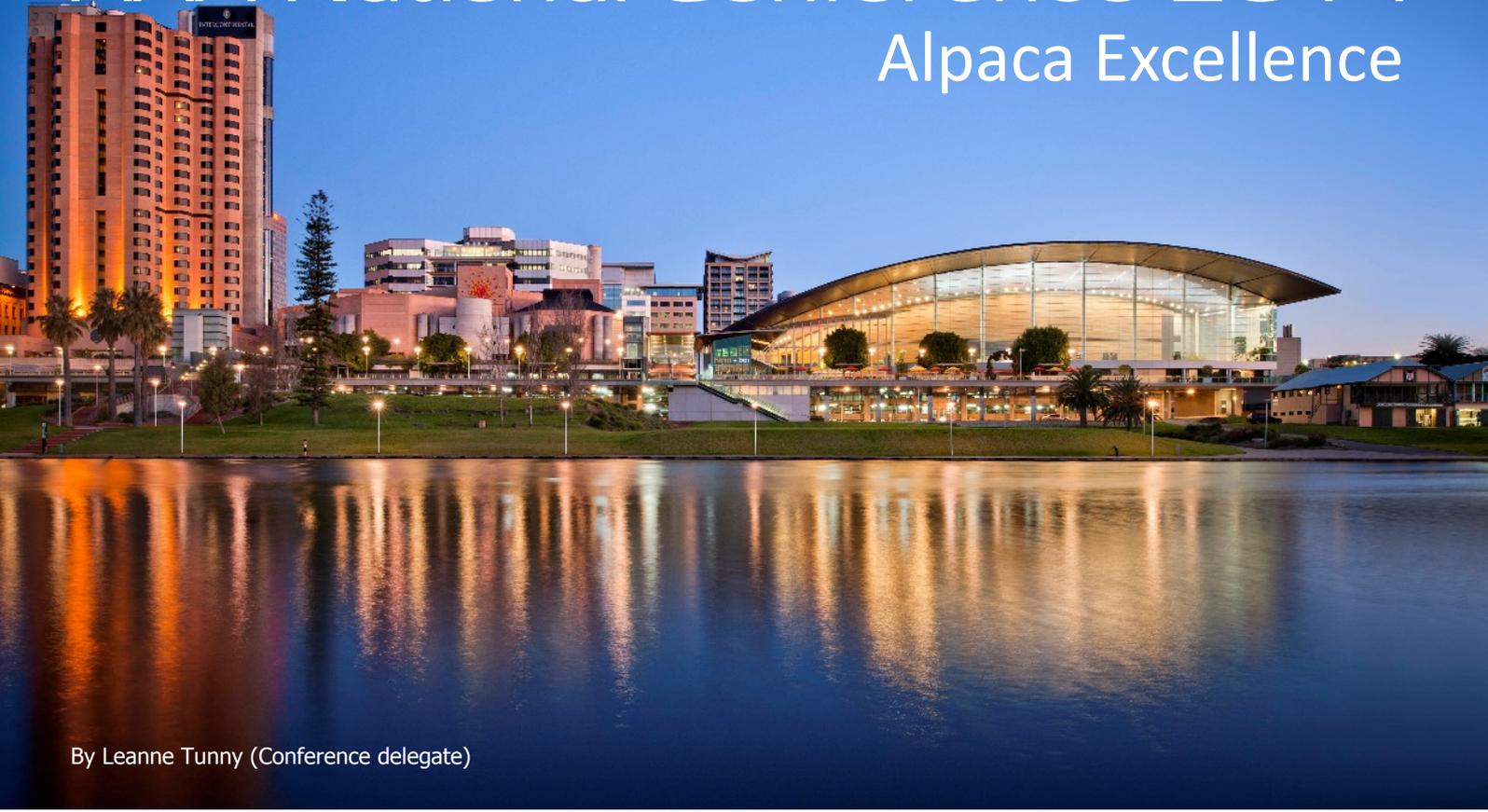
Allan Savory, in his book *Holistic Resource Management*, likens grazing management to juggling a large number of balls. It is complex and requires concentration. I am with Savory in believing that the answers to many of our current environmental problems lie with the development of a better understanding of how the environment operates in all its complexity. We need to aim at working with this complexity and developing management systems that are more in harmony with natural processes.

*Editor Note – Your local Dept. Of Primary Industries should be able to help with local knowledge.*

*Charlie Bell is currently an Education Officer with Tocal College which is part in NSW Dept. of Primary Industries. He has worked in agriculture for over 30 years having been a farmer, agricultural consultant and owner of a specialist agricultural recruitment firm in addition to his career in education. He currently works closely with industry leaders on workforce development projects for sectors including cotton, livestock marketing and biosecurity.*

# AAA National Conference 2014

## Alpaca Excellence



By Leanne Tunny (Conference delegate)

### The AAA/RIRDC Alpaca Excellence Conference was held at the Adelaide Convention Centre 9<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> May.

A very wet and cold Friday morning saw the official opening of what was to be a very informative and entertaining weekend. Our keynote speaker Dr Chris Cebra from the Oregon State University College of Veterinary Medicine was our first speaker and his interesting session on rickets and hypophosphatemia syndrome in alpacas whet our appetite for the diverse range of subjects that were presented in the next three days.

Although the majority of the sessions were conducted in a conference room environment, with a single presenter, throughout each day there was an option to choose from five different workshop sessions (running parallel), some days saw up to nineteen different topics offered. The dilemma for the delegate was – “which one do I choose”?

Session and workshop time slots were adhered to with precision, ensuring that every topic for discussion could be covered.

Presenters offered visual camelid images that ranged from graphic, astonishing, amazing, remarkable, humorous and sometimes even unbelievable. The opportunity to develop and practice skills in assisting with the delivery of a cria under

simulated conditions using a birthing box and a stillborn cria was an invaluable experience.

Many of the workshop presenters were alpaca breeders – breeders who have now generously and willingly passed on some of their knowledge, experience, competencies and results of their success and failures to other breeders. True philanthropists!

A very wide range of topics was covered from alpaca reproduction to neonatal problems, nutrition and pasture, AI in camelids and research projects, marketing and business – too many to name here but all giving delegates more information to support their alpaca business.

Catering was excellent and the breakout times held in the trade display area gave delegates the time to inspect the array of trade stands. The trade displays covered aspects from; breeder information, fibre processing alternatives, transportation options, advertising opportunities to a large variety of raw and processed fibre and handmade alpaca products available for purchase. The new AAA promotional material was also on display to enable members to see what could be available at Regional events.

The Friday night cocktail party and the Saturday dinner were well attended events and the competitions at the dinner tables on the Saturday night showed the competitive spirit of the guests and were great fun.



*Dr Chris Cebra - Conference Keynote speaker*

*Having fun, despite the weather!*



Following the conference, farm visits were conducted to Yaringa, Hayilla, Softfoot and Ambersun studs. Our thanks to these studs for hosting the visits, we all know the work which goes into preparing your farm for these occasions and it was appreciated by the visitors who had a very enjoyable and informative day.

The organizing committee headed by Susan Haese as the Convenor and the National office staff can be very satisfied that, true to their word; "There was something for every breeder on offer".

Running an event such as this is an enormous task for a group of volunteers and the working party that brought this event together in conjunction with our office staff is to be heartily congratulated for a professional and well run event which was enjoyed by all in attendance.

Our thanks to the many speakers who gave their time to be in attendance.

Speakers included: Dr Chris Cebra, Dr Laura Hardefeldt, Chris Williams, Fiona Vanderbeek, Professor Peter Cockcroft, David Reynolds, Adrienne Clarke, Greg Rundle, Dr Ian Carmichael, Allison Quagliani, Dr Alison Lee, Angela Goode, Kerry Caulfield and Luis Chaves Bellido, Bryan McLeod, Dr Simon De Graaf, David Michell, Robyn Betts, Susan Haese (in the absence of Dr Jane Vaughan), Cameron Holt, Dr Kylie Munyard, Kris Lloyd, Ian Frith, Melanie Smith, Dr Stephen Mulholland, Dr Andrew Padula, Elizabeth Paul, Thomas Westermann, Ella Carapetis, Michelle Malt.

A very special thank you to our major sponsors - RIRDC, AAFL & Softfoot Alpacas as without your support this event would not have been possible.

*Conference proceedings are available from the AAA online shop*



Trisha Munley and Cameron Holt at the book signing stall in the trade hall stand on Saturday afternoon. (Photograph by Diane Boede)



Merry group at the Friday night cocktail party (Photograph by Diane Boede)



Some of the conference delegates visit Softfoot Alpacas



One of the many trade stands



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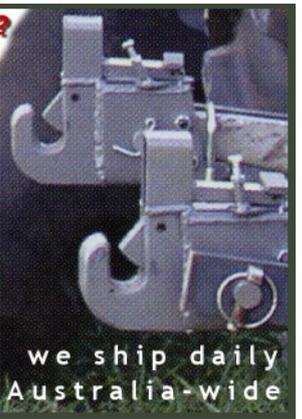
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