



ALPACAS AUSTRALIA

The official publication of the Australian Alpaca Association Ltd



In this issue:

- National Show
- Fleece Scorecards
- History of ET

In this Shearing Season please keep in mind...



**AUSTRALIAN
ALPACA**

Australian Alpaca Fleece Ltd

Working for the Australian Alpaca Industry since 2004

- ✓ AAFL **buys all your Alpaca Fleece.**
- ✓ At AAFL **you get paid for every kilogram you have sent.** (*)
- ✓ AAFL will receive your alpaca fleece **every business day of the year.**
- ✓ **AAFL pays the freight for bales of 100+kg** (**)
- ✓ Do you need more information? Do you want to know how we will use your fleece - or have any other question for us? please contact us:

❖ E-mail: info@aafl.com.au

❖ Phone: +61 3 9311 0933 – Ext. 6

AAFL uses Australian Alpaca to produce high quality clothing

(*) Contaminated fleece will be downgraded or disposed without value, if necessary

(**) Please contact us for freight requirements to access this program.

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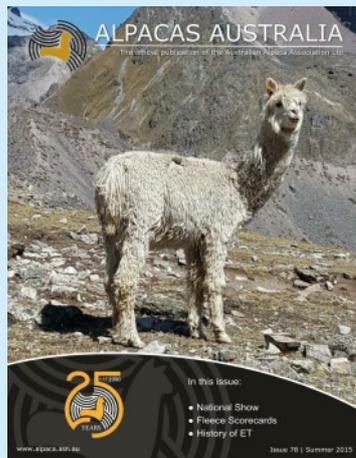
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Cover: Suri at Auzengate, Peru
Photograph courtesy of Jacqui Poldy

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25th Anniversary Celebrations

By Michelle Malt - AAA President

The 2015 National Show and Sale held at Olympic Park in Sydney provided an opportunity to celebrate the 25th Anniversary since the AAA was formed by a group of people who had begun to farm alpacas with a vision for a unique livestock industry.

A gala dinner was held on Saturday night, with the theme being "a touch of Silver", and a highlight was entertainment provided by The Singing Waiters. This was made possible with the support of a number of members – Alpacandes, Bumble Hill Alpaca Stud, Coolawarra Alpacas, Gunnamatta, Pacofino, Shanbrooke Alpaca Stud and Walkely Fields Alpacas.

The President of the British Alpaca Society and Alpacas Canada, in addition to other overseas visitors also attended the dinner to acknowledge this milestone, and around two hundred industry participants gathered to enjoy the entertainment, catch up with friends old and new, and to celebrate their success at our premier industry event.

We were joined by many of our foundation members - Franz and Margaret DeZwart, Andrew and Karen Caldwell, Roger and Sue Haldane, Geoff and Nancy Halpin, Allan and Carolyn Jinks, Ron Condon, Alan Hamilton, Wendy Billington, Judith Street and Janie Hicks; as well as past AAA Presidents Geoff Halpin, Kerry Dwyer, Ian Davison, and Jennifer McAuliffe. AAA Life Members Roger Haldane, Allan Jinks, Graeme Dickson, Bob Richardson, Alan Hamilton, Kerry Dwyer, Paul Haslin and Cameron Holt were also in attendance.

It was my pleasure to present Life Membership to Esme Graham at the dinner. Esme has served the AAA tirelessly for almost twenty years at both Regional (QLD) and National level.

She and husband John bought their first alpacas in 1996 and from 2002 until her election to the AAA Board in 2008, Esme served on the QLD Regional Committee as either President or



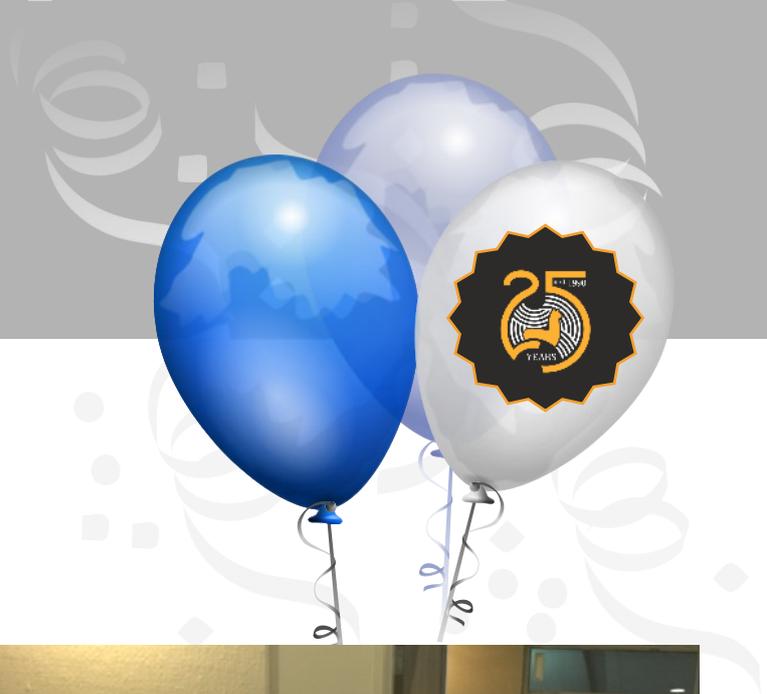
Life Member Esme Graham with AAA President Michelle Malt

Treasurer during that 6 year period. During the past nineteen years she has spent countless hours organising regional events, including being co-convenor of the very successful National Noosa Conference in 2002, a major educational experience in the days when conferences were a celebrated industry event. Her enthusiasm and work ethic continues on and Esme was a Steward and showcase volunteer at the 2015 Brisbane Ekka.

At National level Esme has worked on the Strategic Reference Group and the CLBG Committee which guided the AAA through the process of conversion to become a company. She was also a member of the Industry Promotions Committee.

Esme's work as a Director on the AAA Board for 6 years from 2008 to 2014 is well known. She was instrumental in pulling together the concept of National Alpaca Week from its inception; the series of individual, local and regional promotional events that occur on a national basis, firmly cementing the place of National Alpaca Week into the AAA calendar. Esme still continues her work in this area as QLD Regional Co-ordinator for National Alpaca Week for the past three years.





Foundation members Margaret DeZwart and Nancy Halpin

She took on the task as Magazine Editor from 2011 as part of her responsibilities as a Director, and has continued to serve the membership as Magazine Editor to date, even though she is no longer on the Board. Esme was responsible for having our first on-line AAA magazine come to fruition in 2011.

She worked hard to generate another innovation, the Annual magazine and Product catalogue which showcases much of the industry's wonderful end products and she also recently managed the concept and staging of Urban Alpacas for QLD.

The dinner on Saturday night gives everyone the opportunity to eat, drink and be merry, and to kick back after several days of showing. It is my great regret that we did not take formal photographs during the evening, as we may not have the opportunity to bring this group together again. I would like to thank Paul Haslin and his team of event organisers, in particular Lyn Dickson who arranged for the dinner entertainment, and of course our dinner sponsors (mentioned above) and event sponsors Millpaca and Softfoot, the auction supporter Mark Short – Alpacas Chaparral and all the silent auction sponsors.



Past President Kerry Dwyer with wife Margaret and Geoff Shephard



Peter Sultan With Life Member Bob Richardson



BEHIND THE SCENES:

The Making of Australian Alpaca - Our Smart Future

Images and story by green, green grass communications

The Australian Alpaca Association has continued the celebrations of the first quarter-century of alpacas in Australia, by commissioning a glossy new film production designed to help AAA and members build awareness and excitement for the industry. The new videos have been created to share the merits of Australian alpaca farming with the rest of Australia and the world.

Research for the production began with a series of surveys capturing member experiences of Australian alpaca farming. Feedback received about Australian alpaca was positive and unifying, and provided immense guidance to the final production. Members consistently pinpointed the current and future potential for Australian achievement, and the unique quality inherent in Alpaca end products...

"What gets me up in the morning is the thought of seeing our herd and greeting them all in our chunk of the Australian landscape and being part of a vibrant developing industry, that is also environmentally friendly"

"I love being cutting edge and pushing the boundaries, surprising people with how good alpaca fibre can be & how great alpacas are for the Australian environment. The animals are easy care individuals that are pleasant to own. The industry is full of passionate people."

"The success of the industry is demonstrated by the demand from other nations for Australian bred alpacas..."

"We need to collectively continue to grow the national herd and thus grow the volume of alpaca fibre available"

"We are working toward building the alpaca industry as a true rural industry that is viable"

"There is great potential for Australian alpaca to be recognised as an environmentally positive and high quality product"

"We have come so far with breeding alpacas and are now world class."

... and their genuine passion and regard for their livestock, produce and their lifestyle...

"We fell so in love"

"I live to breed my enchanting alpacas with their big black eyes and soft padded feet"

"What I love most is the pleasure of having these intelligent, environmentally friendly and generally peaceful animals in our lives"

"The best part of my day is when all the different groups come to say hello. Watching our cria play and race around their paddock at dusk"

"Watching the alpacas from the kitchen window just doing their thing"

"Getting a glass of wine in the evening and sitting in the paddock with the alpacas. I have even had one stick their nose into the glass"

"(Alpaca fibre is) truly sensual and delightful"

"A rare, unique and exquisite fibre"

Green, green grass communications developed the brief received from Dinah Fisher, AAA's Director Marketing & Communications, to produce a film to educate and inspire prospective breeders and customers of alpaca products, by sharing members' experiences of the opportunities and joys of the industry and product to relevant wider audiences. "Video has developed into such an exciting way to share a message online. It was clear from the start that the film needed to communicate the excitement of Australian alpaca in an informative but beautiful and emotive way", said green, green grass communications director Karen Davies.

After recruiting acclaimed film production team Projector Films, an elite team of film specialists was called together. The creative team has worked on projects as diverse as Oranges & Sunshine, One Eyed Girl, Murder Mouth, Band of Brothers, and About a Boy, among many others. Their work has been recognised at events such as Tropfest, Sundance and the Melbourne International Film Festival, and work with producers including South Australian Film Commission, Foxtel, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Team members were specifically selected for their visual and story-telling skills and briefed to capture the uplifting, inspiring, and beautiful story that is Australian alpaca.

Survey feedback enabled the creative team to plan a tight and productive filming schedule involving location filming and interviewing a variety of breeders representative of the industry as a whole. The team worked to draw the individual stories together with the clarity and visual appeal essential to an effective promotional video for today's viewers.

Crew travelled to a selection of studs, where many AAA members generously gave up their time to support the production. Before long, in the beautiful landscapes afforded by the Australian countryside, the alpaca-novice creative team were just as in love with alpaca as every breeder they met, as once again the productive, clever, inquisitive alpaca wove its bewitching spell.





The result, says Ms Fisher, is a beautiful, uplifting film that celebrates the Australian alpaca and the many people who have helped create the industry, and who each day build its forward success. "The film will stand as testament to the excellence being achieved every day by Australian breeders in alpaca genetics, meat, fleece and fibre products, to the profound suitability and productivity of the alpaca in the Australian landscape, and to the supportive community that is this industry".

Positive feedback about the film is already streaming in. With all the talent, passion, energy and opportunity inherent in Australian alpaca now sharable on screen, it will be inspiring industry growth for some time to come. To quote the film:

"It's an exciting venture. Our genetics and our animals are in demand and are now driving the industry forward."

"Anyone coming into the industry now is going to have a great opportunity to set their mark."

Now, the excitement really begins. The future is brilliant for the alpaca industry."

To view AAA's brand new Australian Alpaca film for yourself, visit <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdiI87dssI32GNPUjIAjEuQ>

The Australian Alpaca Association's Our Smart Future video is now a key marketing resource for Association and membership, with several versions being prepared for online & live event use. They will be leveraged by the Australian Alpaca Association online in campaigns for some time to come. Members can look forward to receiving further information and resource links shortly to aid them in accessing the new assets for their own future marketing activities as well.

CREDITS/THANKS

The Association and its team thanks all studs involved, as well as the many who contributed from behind the scenes (including those who helped with surveys and research), and of course the several thousand alpaca who hypnotized the crew into producing a beautiful film that will inspire new alpaca farmers for years to come.

Client: Dinah Fisher, Director Marketing & Promotions, Australian Alpaca Association

Creative & Strategy: Karen Davies, green, green grass communications

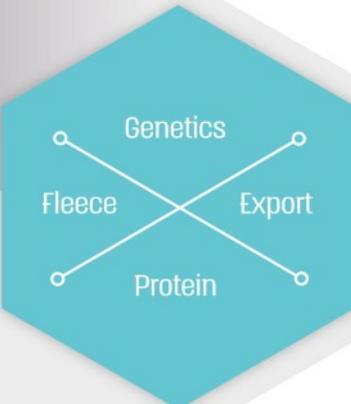
Film Production: Projector Films - Allan Collins, Dave Gegan, Daniel Joyce, Nick Matthews, David Ngo, Dave Scarborough,

Special Thanks to:

Alpha Centauri - Andrew and Bronwyn Munn
 Coolawarra - Janie Hicks
 E P Cambridge - Catherine & Matthew Lloyd & family
 Fleur de Lys - Alexander & Luke Scarlett
 Merrijig - Steven & Mary Chiodo, Steve Klingsporn
 Millpaca - Ian Frith
 Pastuso Restaurant team and chef Alejandro Saravia
 Softfoot - Ben Schmaal
 Surilana - Angela and Ian Preuss
 Velieris Carpets - Ed Holman

and the many, many more who assisted behind the scenes in so many ways with the long research and preparations involved in making this film

We are redefining what is possible for the Alpaca industry.



Our commitment to quality

Millpaca Stud is a proud member of the Australian Alpaca Association and we're committed to helping ensure the long-term viability of the domestic alpaca industry. The success of our industry depends on all those who are part of it being able to achieve premium prices for the highest quality fleece we can produce, and that's why we place such a high emphasis on genetics.

Our breeding program is focused on improving the lineage of Huacaya alpacas in Australia, as the future sustainability and growth of the alpaca fleece market here is dependant upon delivering excellence with sustainability.

That means being able to produce a consistent level of fine fleece that is of consistently high volume and a lower standard deviation.

We have over 3500 alpacas at any given time and continue to add top sires and dams to our program as we breed and procure them, ensuring Millpaca remains at the forefront of the alpaca stud breeding industry in Australia.

Our Lineage is Best of Breed

Many of our award-winners have been sired from some of the best alpaca stock in the country. Millpaca's specialty bloodlines include Ambersun Fortune Seeker, Koorana Park Black Knight, Shanbrooke

Accoyo Invincible, Cambridge Streetwise, Shanbrooke Plantel Haynacho, Blaka Galahad, Jolimont Warrior, Warramunga Downs Paladin, Banksia Park Colorado and Blue Grass Centurion.

The Golden Fibre

With careful breeding many of Millpaca's stud animals are achieving superfine fleece. This much sort after clip is always snapped up by premier producers or used for our expanding range of Millpaca products.

But what about the rest of our commercial herd? Currently we have over 3500 animals grazing over our three farms. Many of these are held for fibre and meat production.

Currently our fibre is made into coats, jumpers, scarves, wraps, socks, pillows and doonas. We also manufacture a range of premium quality blankets and knitting yarns under the Millpaca brand.



Who said they would never eat it?

Our alpaca prime cuts have enjoyed instant success in many quality restaurants around the country. Racks, loin, backstrap, sirloin and slow cooked shoulder cuts are all popular. But it has been the success of the lesser cuts that is driving our profitability.

Hamburger patties, gourmet sausages, pies and kofta sticks are all going gangbusters at pub bistros, as are slow cooked shanks and neck rosettes.

We are currently in the testing phase on a range of smallgoods and cured meats. Alpaca prosciutto has to be tasted to be believed. But it does not stop there. How about Alpaca jerky (delicious)? Or Alpaca Paté? Even Asian-style Steamed Buns full of braised shoulder meat, developed with our fantastic chef's David Campbell and Alejandro Saravia.



Join us on our mission of placing the Australian Alpaca Industry firmly on the world stage. Call us on (02) 4464 1728 or email at alpacas@millpaca.com or visit our website.



AGE

(Across Herd Genetic Evaluation)



It's important, and we're doing it wrong!

By Dr Stephen Mulholland, Ph.D.

When the AGE program was launched around 2003 I was very excited. I am a very big fan of proper quantitative genetics. Done right, a program like AGE can hugely speed the genetic development of a herd. It allows you to make very good and truly informed breeding decisions. We submitted data in one of the first AGE rounds.

Then, as I got to see how the AGE had been designed and implemented, my enthusiasm waned. Of late I have become highly critical of the AGE, and since I started expressing that criticism publicly, I was asked to write this article to explain what I think is wrong with the AGE as it now stands, and how we could do it much better.

What is the concept of the AGE?

At its most fundamental level AGE is about distinguishing the genotype (the genetic makeup) of an organism from its phenotype (what it looks like). AGE should allow us to separate and quantify

the genetic strengths and weakness of a male or female; how likely it is to throw a cria with improved fleece fineness, staple length, or any other measurable and heritable trait.

The AGE analyzes the traits of offspring to determine the genetic contribution of the sire and dam. In theory it should distinguish between the animals that look good but throw mediocre cria from the "gems in the rough" which don't look exceptional and could never win a show ribbon, yet produce cria that are truly outstanding.

This is the so-called "breed value", the strength and weaknesses of an animal in different traits. This information allows you to then pick the males and females with the best genetics, so that you can make the fastest improvements in your herd.

AGE is objective and quantifiable, and lets you pick the traits that are important to your own breeding program, while showing is subjective, and only provides limited information about an animal's phenotype.

What is the problem with AGE?

There is a very old adage of computer science: Garbage In = Garbage Out. What this means is that no matter how complex your mathematics, and no matter how powerful your computer, if you input meaningless numbers (garbage) you will get meaningless numbers back out. The results might look superficially good, with lots of apparent precision and attached to all sorts of fancy graphs, but if the input was flawed the output will never be good.

And sadly that's what we've done with the AGE system. Let me explain some of the most fundamental problems.

1: The cria fleece is a terrible measure of alpaca quality

The AGE system is designed to take one sample from each animal entered, and that sample is usually the cria fleece. The problem is that the cria fleece is probably one of the worst possible choices for evaluating the genetic qualities that have been passed on to a cria. Why?

(a) The "fluff" the cria is born with is often very different than the fleece that grows in after they are born. Depending on the age of the cria at time of sampling this neonatal fleece can play a large biasing role in the measured quality of the fleece. And the AGE has no provision to account for people who trim away this neonatal fleece. Furthermore cria fleece often coarsens considerably after birth. A sample submitted from a 6 month old might appear much finer than a sample submitted from the same animal when 12 months old.

(b) The amount of neonatal fleece can vary a great deal between cria, and this complicates annualizing the fleece traits. Measured staple length and fleece weight can be off by 30% in cria fleeces due to this contribution. The AGE can't account for this, so all the reports it produces of fleece weight and staple length heritability and variability are rendered meaningless.

(c) Cria fleece traits can have no relation to the adult fleece traits (particularly mean micron, SD/CV, and crimp structure). We should be breeding animals that give high quality, commercially valuable fleeces for 10 or more years. Yet the AGE fails to provide valid information for such traits.

Let me provide an example from our own herd- two of our female progeny, "M" and "C". They both came from very similar dams (this is important, we'll get to more on this later). They were both black, and had very similar life conditions (health, body score, time of first mating, etc. All these are important, and AGE should do a better job at requiring such data to get more meaningful results). The first (cria) fleece for both these girls was taken at 12 months, and was 20 micron. AGE would consider them to be genetic equals, and rate their sires and dams accordingly. But if we wait 2 more years we find that by the third fleece "M" is still 20 microns, while "C" is now 32 microns. These are very different animals, with very different underlying genetics, yet AGE cannot detect such differences.

Based on AGE data you cannot determine the difference between animals that produce offspring with fine, high-quality fleeces and those that make carpet-grade fleece.

As a single data point AGE cannot tell you how animals perform over time. In our experience some animals produce quality fleece only in their first year, while other animals can go anywhere from 2 to 12 years before the fleece quality degrades significantly. This sort of information is absolutely vital for breeding commercially viable fleece production animals and yet is totally ignored by AGE.

2: Without knowing about the dams the results are meaningless.

To the best of my knowledge, most users of the AGE are mainly interested in studs (sires). Using the progeny to find out what strengths their studs have, and making breeding decisions accordingly. Or they use the AGE rankings of a stud to advertise it, hoping for outside matings and financial gain. The problem is that the stud is only half the picture and by not taking the dam into account we can get a very incorrect assessment of the sire. The dam provides half the genes, and dams are much more variable than sires (since sires are much more carefully selected).

Example

Let's look at two imaginary studs, "Able" and "Baker", and try to see which one produces offspring with finer fleece. Each has ten offspring. The offspring of Able were all 23 micron, while those of Baker were all 25 micron. Which stud has better genetic fineness? With just this information you (and the AGE) would say Able.

But what if all the dams Able was put across were 18 micron, while all the dams Baker was put across were 40 micron? Able's offspring are five micron coarser than their dams, while Baker's are 15 microns finer. Which stud would you say has the better genetic fineness now?

Without knowing the contribution of the dam it is impossible to accurately measure the genetic contribution of the sire. AGE does not require the dam's fleece data be entered, and if it were present (because she had been entered into AGE as a cria in a previous pass) then it would most likely be her cria fleece which probably has no relation to her actual adult fleece quality. If you don't take the adult fleece information of the dam into account, you cannot measure the true genetic contribution of any sire.

3: By ignorance or malice the AGE system can be distorted, and thus abused.

While the AGE system is itself badly constructed, the results it produces can be further distorted by the data input by the user. Because many people still trust the AGE, they can be badly misled and make poor breeding decisions.

(a) The AGE requires that all animals input be registered in the IAR (for establishing family relationships). Yet only slightly more than half of all males are now registered. In addition, the guidelines state that "All progeny born in an analysis year need to be submitted to AGE to ensure the AGE analysis is not biased by missing genetic data", this is correct, yet there is no mechanism I know of to test that this is true. If people aren't registering their pet-boys, then those animals are being excluded from AGE calculations.

(b) Breed values don't take into account the number of progeny. Studs with very few offspring can have very distorted (not statistically valid) results. Furthermore, studs used for different purposes can end up with deceiving results in the AGE analysis. An "improver" stud might be used across very primitive, low-quality females, and thus look much worse than he actually is, while a "refiner" might only be used across the best females, and thus look better than he actually is (see the hypothetical example of Able and Baker above).

(c) The "cherry-picked" result can be very deceiving. This could be done by honest mistake, or as a deliberate attempt to mislead people as to the genetic quality of a stud male. If I enter a stud into the AGE, and carefully pick only a few progeny with the most fantastic fleece results (the product of either exceptional females, or just the occasional wild luck of a great cria that comes from otherwise mediocre parents), then I can have a stud that suddenly rates as one of the best in the country. And he might not be. Honestly, we can't know or tell how good he is, as AGE results are worthless (garbage in = garbage out).

I know people who are "doing it right", and doing their best. They input all the progeny data, and carefully record many traits with good accuracy and precision. But they are trapped in a flawed system. They might be able to use their results effectively within their own breeding program on their farm to make better decisions, but their animals cannot be fairly and quantitatively compared to others within Australia or NZ due to the poor and inconsistent way in which the AGE data is collected and processed.

I would love to have a proper AGE-type system. On our farm we are trying to run a very good science-based system applying semi-quantitative genetic evaluation (within the limits set by statistical certainty in our relatively small herd size). But we find it nearly impossible to buy males, females, or stud services because almost no breeders keep enough or the right kind of records for us to assess the genetic worth of their animals. It would be great if we could use an actual, functional, AGE-type system to go out and find the studs that are carrying the traits we want to breed for. It would make stud selection an informed choice, and not a trip to the used-car salesman (see my other article in the issue about selecting animals and reading advertisements). If we all could make those informed decisions, it would not take long before the quality of the NZ herd soared.

We need an AGE that:

- Accounts for the contribution of the dam .
- Looks at more than the cria fleece, giving us information on the adult fleece production.
- Can track progeny over time, so that we can breed for fleeces that stay good for longer .
- Encourages people to participate, and enter more data for the benefit of all (meaning tracking more than just the traits any one individual is interested in) .
- Can better sort the data by time and generation. (Did you know that we have no idea if, or by how much, the average alpaca has improved in NZ over the last 20 years? We can't consider ourselves a forward-looking industry if we're stumbling around blind) .

A new and improved AGE could be integrated with a new and improved registry system. (The current registry is filled with bad data, and has a number of design flaws. If the AGE is going to

rely on the registry for relationship and other data, we need to make sure the registry is modern and functional, too.) It would be possible to provide web-based tools which would allow members to input lots of historic fleece information. This could let us test our new AGE to make sure it is working- we could see how the predicted breed values of the studs of the past match the actual outcome of their progeny generation upon generation. Yes, it would take hours of work for each of us to input all that historic data, but if it would allow us to make better breeding decisions, and thus save years of time improving the national herd, I think it would be time well spent.

We (the AANZ) could do an AGE-type system right, and we could do it ourselves. It wouldn't cost too much, and we would have an actual breed development tool under our control that could make us world leaders in alpaca genetics. It just requires the will. We have to fight the inertia of "we already have something, so it must be good enough". It's not. We need a good breed development system, and if we won't make a new one, we need to simply dump the old one. The AGE as is stands now is deceptive, it's not grounded in good science, and it has the disturbing potential to do more harm than good, especially if any bad actors decide to deliberately rot the system.

Stephen Mulholland originally trained as a laboratory scientist, and holds a Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics. In 2003 he moved to NZ, purchased a small farm, and started raising alpaca. When the first of those animals died in 2004, Stephen began investigating the available information on camelid morbidity and mortality, and was disappointed with the results. In 2005 he began, with the assistance of the AANZ and the NZLA, to run health surveys of the llama and alpaca populations of NZ. To date he has collected more than 15,000 animal-years of data on their morbidity, mortality and management. Stephen also works closely with the Animal Welfare Directorate of the Ministry for Primary Industries. He led the team which produced the final draft of the Code of Welfare: Llamas and Alpacas, presented that draft code to the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, and consulted with the ministry throughout the further development of the Code up to its launch in April 2013.

As an offshoot of his work with MPI, Stephen joined the Johnes Management Limited consultant network in 2012 and now acts as a contact point for discussions involving the disease in camelids in NZ. In 2013 he started a collaboration with Dr Kylie Munyard of Curtin University to study the genetic underpinnings of dwarfism in alpacas, and he is in talks with Massey University to launch an in-depth epidemiological analysis of the eight years of accumulated health survey data.

Stephen has written dozens of articles for the trade magazines of the llama and alpaca associations. Keen to increase the general literacy of owners as to what they can do to improve animal welfare, improve management practices, and make better-informed breeding decisions, in June 2013 he founded a camelid health and welfare charitable trust with other interested llama and alpaca owners: www.camelidhealth.org He also works with, and helps do fund-raising for, local SPCA chapters.

Letters from Members who would like to comment on the above are welcome and should be sent to – Editor, Alpacas Australia – alpacas@paltarrapark.com.au

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Richard Dixon Scholarship – Visit to Peru

By Jacqui Poldy



A few short weeks ago I stepped off a plane, back on Australian soil after more than a month away, a world apart and with my mind overflowing with insights, education, some worries, and a sense of awe. I had just returned from my 'alpaca trip', for which I had been preparing for more than a year. It will take me at least as long again to truly digest the experience.

I am a veterinarian, fresh out of the pipeline as a new graduate, and working in mixed practice in North East Victoria. I became curious and interested in South American camelids in my veterinary studies, but felt that I wanted to know more than was offered through the coursework and occasional encounters during my degree. Looking to refine my interests and continue to develop my camelid knowledge and skills beyond graduation I sought out international experience. My desires were to enhance my practical skills in alpaca husbandry and veterinary management, and to contribute to the veterinary support of camelid production with this expertise. I was incredibly lucky to have the backing of the Australian Alpaca Association to facilitate this adventure.



Step one: get some solid hands-on experience in alpaca medicine.

My first stop overseas landed me in Amherst, Massachusetts, where I was to complete an intensive week-long veterinary camelid practice course offered by the North American Camelid Studies Program, run by Dr Steve Purdy at his teaching farm. This course gave me opportunities far beyond what I could have gained in a traditional classroom environment. Between three pupils, a passionate teacher and a few dozen alpacas, we had every opportunity to practice pregnancy diagnosis, behavioural testing, faecal evaluations, blood collections, condition scoring and a suit of other practical skills. The training concluded with two days at local farms, where we put our newly forged medical and surgical proficiencies to the test.

Interestingly, Dr Purdy's account of the alpaca industry in the United States described studs that breed largely for the show industry, in which fleece is considered almost a bi-product. High quality animals and the production costs can far outweigh the financial returns. The market value of traded livestock is a strong driver of industry profitability and their short supply means that trade in alpaca commands high prices. In other words, farming

for the elite. Does this compare to the focus in Australia of breeding to establish a viable and sustainable industry, with supply of fibre to meet local and international demand as the ultimate objective? No doubt our industries have similar markets.

Step two: putting it all to use.

Following my practical training in Amherst, I was to meet up with a team of volunteers, headed again by Dr Purdy, to participate in the 'Nuñoa Project' in Peru. This non-profit organisation aims to enhance herd productivity for Peruvian alpaca farmers by improving reproduction management. I had some time to kill between completing the camelid studies program and joining the other volunteers in Cusco (who I affectionately considered 'the alpaca team'), and decided to conquer the Ausangate Circuit, a high altitude trek in the Peruvian altiplano.

Here, I was thrilled to observe an abundance of vicuna herds charging across the Andean slopes. Vicunas are delightful creatures, elegant and more fragile looking than their domesticated alpaca cousins. With their fawn fleece and pale undercarriage, they are also remarkably hard to spot. Amongst the greys, browns and ochre palette of the Peruvian altiplano a vicuna can pass easily unobserved. Two features undermine their camouflage in the boulder strewn hillside, one they move; two, their shrill bird-like cry of alarm. Perhaps because my experience (as an Australian) of herds of wild mammals has until now been largely limited to the macropod variety, I was moved and impressed by the herds of these shy, untamed creatures.

From the wild and delicate vicuna, my next experience brought me to the other extreme of South American camelids. With still a few days to spare before meeting the alpaca team I got in contact with a humanitarian husband-wife team, constituting the 'Llama Pack Project' based in Urubamba in the Sacred Valley.

Trekking is an enormous part of Peruvian tourism, and, like the one I had just completed, frequently makes use of horses as pack animals to carry camping and cooking equipment and supplies.

Llama Pack's intentions are to facilitate local llama producers to become involved in this industry by breeding llamas that are of sufficient size and stature to fulfil the role of pack animals. Given the llamas' history as pack animals of the Inca's, and that they are far better suited to the high altitude environment than horses, this would seem a reasonable and achievable ambition. In fact, there are enormous hurdles.



Llama herd



Suri alpaca at Auzengate

I spent a few days visiting herding families and was astounded by the lifestyles of these hardy people. One morning required a 3:00 a.m. start so that we could hike the 12 kilometres to meet the family before their herds were brought out to graze at day break. The isolation and hardship of their lifestyle, was matched only by the staggering beauty of the landscape that is their home. With no electricity or running water, bare earthen floors and a smoky llama-dung fire for cooking and warmth, children in the families are often afflicted by illness, while the distances preclude education or health care. As confronting as this was, I was heartened that these communities were seeking to enhance their livelihood through herd improvement, including veterinary engagement and advice.

Ultimately I was joined in Peru by the other volunteer alpaca team members of the Nuñoa Project, including Dr Steve Purdy, Peruvian veterinarian Dr Gerado Diaz and two pre-vet and two veterinary students from the USA. After travelling to Pucara in the Puno district, where we were to base ourselves for the following ten days, our work followed a regular pattern.

Each day we travelled to local communities where producers would present their alpaca herds for assessment. Largely we performed ultrasound guided pregnancy diagnoses, body condition scoring and evaluation of breeding animal conformation and fibre, as well as a subselection of faecal analyses. Several of the community members, including children, were interested to learn how to assess their animals' health, especially where skills such as condition scoring require no advanced equipment.

There was wide variation in the animals seen and the breeding management in these communities. Some herds had exceptional pregnancy rates, while others were abysmal. Common features were many low condition score animals and an apparent high mortality amongst crias.

Just as daily life for the farmers is very difficult, their animals are also challenged by the harsh environment. At this time of year the pasture is dry and of poor nutritional value. Temperatures are well below freezing at night and, at times in the most remote communities, snow may cover the ground for several days at a time.



Remote field work



Mummified alpaca foetuses

Our evaluations were the initial stage of a program to help the communities we visited by responding to their request for assistance to improve alpaca production. I am a firm believer in the significance of education to facilitate veterinary care, and of the importance that animals provide to individuals and communities.

I found the goals of the Nuñoa Project particularly admirable in their aspiration to equip local farmers with the knowledge and skills to improve their animals' health care, productivity, and through this their own livelihood, which depends primarily on the sale of alpaca fleece and to a lesser extent on meat sales.

Back in Australia, I find myself tackling dogs, cats, horses, sheep, goats, cows, and yes, the odd alpaca. They are currently only a fraction of the mix at my workplace, but they are never far from my mind. I certainly feel I am now well equipped for my next camelid callout. I also know that it will be a long time before Peru leaves me. Perhaps, before then, I will return.

Jacqui Poly was the recipient of the 2014 Richard Dixon Memorial Scholarship awarded by the Australian Alpaca Association. The \$5,000 scholarship is awarded every two years to a final year veterinary student wishing to further their studies on camelid medicine. Applications for the next scholarship open in 2016.



Fleece to yarn



THE 2015

AAA NATIONAL

SHOW & SALE

By Lyn Dickson



Alpaca enthusiasts from all over Australia travelled to Sydney this year for our premier National event in September - the AAA National Show & Sale.

The weather gods smiled and turned on near perfect conditions for showing alpacas - not too hot, not too humid (which is always the worry leading into alpaca events in Sydney) and even a dry, coolish breeze blowing for most of the four days.

Once again, National Show Convenor/Event Manager Paul Haslin and his team worked diligently for many months to conduct a multi-faceted event, which covers not just the Halter Show for the best alpacas in the land, but the Fleece Show, Craft Show, Art & Photography Show, Youth Paraders, Junior Judging, the Auction and the Silent Auction, the Trade Stands and this year the 25th Anniversary Dinner.

Our hardworking and thorough Halter Show judges Karen Caldwell from NSW and Tim Hey from the UK judged tirelessly for 4 days, carefully examining over 520 alpaca exhibits to determine the eventual Supreme Champion Huacaya, EP Cambridge Fire Hunter, exhibited by EP Cambridge Alpaca Stud, S.A.

Along the way to becoming Supreme Champion Huacaya, EP Cambridge Fire Hunter came through as Champion Senior Male Huacaya from the highly competitive white class. The Supreme Champion Suri, Light Fawn male Kurrawa Ready Aim Fire exhibited

by Kurrawa Alpacas, Vic was also the Champion Senior Male Suri.

Best Colours for suri and huacaya were judged on Sunday at the end of the Show and spectators were able to enter the ring and inspect the line-up after the awards were made in each colour section; always a popular scenario.

A highlight for exhibitors and spectators at the National is the high quality video presentation of alpacas and their fleeces on the big screen during the judging and this year's hi-tech screen was arguably the best ever for clarity of detail.

Fleece judge, Angela Preuss, working with apprentice Sophie Jackson, had a marathon 2 days' judging over 200 exhibits to decide upon the Supreme Champion Huacaya Fleece, Whyte Park Timothy, exhibited by Softfoot Alpaca Stud S.A and the Supreme Champion Suri Fleece, Bumble Hill Cordillo, exhibited by Bumble Hill Alpaca Stud, NSW.

The Allan Jinks Perpetual Trophy for the most valuable commercial fleece was won by Kurrawa Legends Challenge owned by Faversham Alpacas.

Whyte Park Timothy, from the 48 - 60 months white class, also received the Bill Plunkett Memorial Trophy for Grand Champion Fleece, competing against the Supreme Champion Suri Fleece. A special mention must go to Pauline Glasser, Chief Steward of the Fleece Section and her conscientious team from Northern NSW who were unstinting in their creation of a fabulous fleece display.



Supreme Champion Suri Kurrawa Ready Aim Fire & Supreme Champion Huacaya EP Cambridge Fire Hunter

One of the biggest smiles of the show came from Hannah Doyle who travelled down from Rockhampton in QLD especially for the day to take out the Champion Junior Judge award on Sunday morning, following on from the Association's AGM.

The Youth Paraders section was convened by Tammy O'Keefe and judged by Paraders' stalwart, Michael Williams, NSW. Winners were: Supreme Champion Parader, Open Division - Imogen Boughy Supreme Champion Parader, Preliminary Division - Georgia Matheson-Gee

Congratulations to all the ribbon winners across all sections, far too numerous to mention in this summary. Full results can be downloaded from the AAA website.

This year the National Auction was conducted in a different format; a Helmsman style auction in an attempt to reinvigorate the traditional auction format. This type of auction is growing in popularity in other livestock breeds and also in certain sectors of the real estate market.

About 60% clearance rate was achieved and those who bought and sold alpacas seemed happy with their individual results. In addition to local and international buyers in attendance on the night there were over ten telephone bidders; local, interstate and international, many of whom commented that they enjoyed being able to follow the progress of the auction on their computer screens.

However there was a degree of criticism and dissatisfaction regarding departure from the traditional format from some members and no doubt this will be a hot topic for those who step forward to mount the next National Show and Sale.

The 25th Anniversary of the Australian Alpaca Association brought together a number of original foundation members, along with Life

Members, who were invited to the Silver Anniversary Dinner as special guests. Many of these "pioneers" were present over the course of the show and all thoroughly enjoyed their "alpaca fix".

All made comment on the great progress made over the past 25 years in the quality of breeding stock and fleeces now being bred and showcased.

The Silver Anniversary dinner also saw guests in attendance from UK, Canada and NZ representing their respective alpaca organisations. An impromptu operatic performance by the Three Tenors, disguised as waiters added to the fun and made for a most memorable occasion for those present.

During the course of the dinner, Life Membership was awarded to Esme Graham from Queensland and special presentations were made to two retiring judges, Ron Reid and Julie Bird.



Successful Paraders

Most Successful Exhibitor Huacaya Fleece: Softfoot Alpaca Stud, S.A

Most Successful Exhibitor Suri Fleece: Pfeiffer Park Alpacas, QLD

Most Successful Exhibitor Hucaya Halter: EP Cambridge Alpaca Stud, S.A

Most Successful Exhibitor Suri Halter: Baarooka Alpacas, VIC

Most Successful Overall Huacaya Exhibitor: Softfoot Alpaca Stud, S.A

Most Successful Overall Suri Exhibitor: Baarooka Alpacas, VIC

It takes many people to successfully organise all of the parts that mesh together to bring to fruition the whole National Show, which is the ultimate showcase and core of our industry's efforts for the year. To all those who gave their time, sponsorship and donations we offer our sincere thanks.

A special thanks must go to major sponsors Millpaca, the 2015 Show Premium Partner plus Softfoot Alpaca Stud as Gold Sponsor. The generosity of these studs helped to provide the financial framework which made our National Show possible.



Ron Condon, Sue Haldane, Rick Hodgson, Life Member - Roger Haldane & Life Member Alan Jinks catching up at the show



Art, Craft and Photography - National Show Sydney
By Sarah Wheeler

This year was my second consecutive year of convening this section of the National Show. I continue to be amazed by the standard of work that is entered. It was good to see the increased numbers entered this year for Art and Photography. Mark Short returned to judge the Art and Photography section. Lionel Tomich received the champion trophy for Photography for his collage photo of his daughter on their farm, with Lyn de Bruyn taking reserve champion for 'Fresh alpaca in the pantry'. In the junior section Hannah Fletcher produced the Junior Champion Photograph for a landscape with an alpaca lit by a dusk sky. Bethany Hartill received junior reserve championship with her photo entitled Love you.

For the art section, Catherine Proctor received Champion artwork for her two cria pastel, with Sandy Retallick taking reserve Champion artwork with her sculpture. In the junior section Hannah Fletcher received the championship trophy with her alpaca sculpture and Bethany Hartill received the reserve for her 3D felt artwork entitled 'alpaca dreaming'.

Our judge for the craft section was Brenda Horne, a craft judge from the Hawksbury region of NSW. Champion Hand spun yarn went to Janet de Rooy with the reserve championship going to Jan Bentley. Champion and reserve champion for hand weaving went to Ingrid Wass. Champion Knit/Crochet to Barbara Oaks and the reserve championship to Helen Philips. Champion Felting to Anne Marie Harwood and reserve to Judith Roberts. Junior champion went to Hannah Fletcher. Supreme Champion Alpaca Craft Exhibit went to Anne Marie Harwood for her felted handbag and Most Successful Craft Exhibitor to Jan Bentley. A special mention should go to Hannah Fletcher who, as mentioned above, won Championships for Junior photograph, artwork and craft – an artist to watch in the future!



Supreme Champion Alpaca Craft Exhibit by Anne Marie Harwood

Champion Artwork by Catherine proctor



Champion Junior Artwork by Hannah Fletcher



Up & Coming Judge

By Di Baker

Congratulations to Hannah Doyle from Rockhampton in Queensland for an outstanding year in Junior Judging.

Hannah is currently studying at the Gatton Campus of Queensland University to become a vet scientist.

Even though her studies have been very taxing this year she has still managed to compete in the Junior sections of several shows, commencing the year by taking out First place at the Toowoomba Royal.

She then went on to take First place at the Queensland Royal qualifying her to compete at Nationals

Hannah then went on and won at the Australian Alpaca Association National Show and Sale -- National Champion Junior Judge

What an achievement Hannah.

You truly are a star and we look forward to seeing what you can achieve next year by competing more broadly at the Queensland Royal covering other breeds as well as the alpacas.



Up Periscope For Alpaca Youth

By Karen Davies - green green grass communications

The Australian Alpaca Association's National Show & Sale was the scene for Australian Alpaca Youth's (AAY) debut into livestream web broadcasting in September this year.

AAY's vice-president and secretary Rubey Williams, aged 15, said the youth group team, aged 5 to 19, embraced the opportunity to share as much of the colour and excitement of the industry's key event with the world as possible.

"We used Periscope, which is such amazing new technology. Anyone, anywhere, can access it. It is a free app that can be downloaded onto your phone and people can watch and chat with you while you film. It was really cool", said Miss Williams, who was interviewed by ABC Radio Country Hour about the online initiative. "We were able to share moments from the showing, interview some industry leaders who were at the event, and show off some of the alpacas." Miss Williams said the team were excited to create new audiences, with viewers within and beyond the alpaca industry, all around the world. With over 1700 likes generated by their entry to the digital broadcasting sphere, they may even have inspired future alpaca farmers.

Australian Alpaca Association Director for Marketing & Promotions, Dinah Fisher, said that it was essential for the industry to continue to reach out into these key new digital environments. "The power of social media continues to grow and grow", she said. "It's an exciting, accessible, affordable way to target new customers, build awareness and reputation. We'll be looking for more ways to engage in this space, and we're delighted that the AAY team was able to engage so effectively in it. They've developed some great new skills that will be of undoubted value in their future careers, and we hope to see more of this kind of dynamic engagement with our younger membership in time to come."

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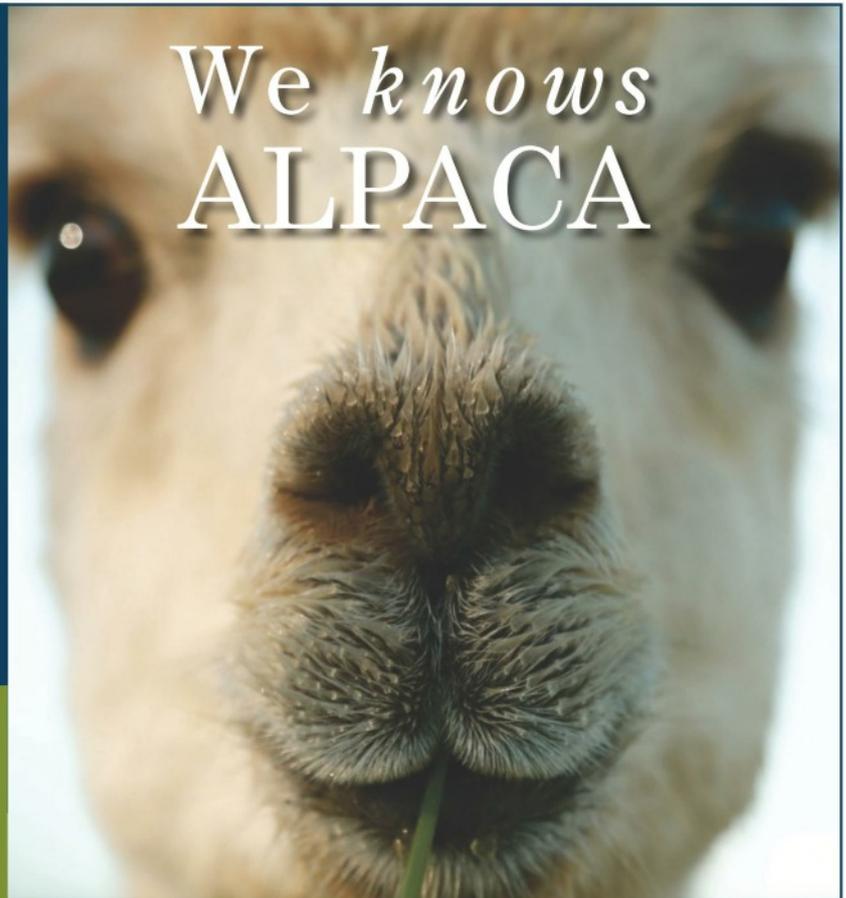
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A Yellow Cria?

By Dr Stephen Mulholland, Ph.D.

As anyone who has tried breeding camelids knows, the colour genetics of these lovely animals can be rather complex. When birth time comes, and the cria just starts to poke out its little nose, I wait in anxious curiosity to see what colour (or colours) have resulted.

In November 2012 one of our alpacas was giving birth, and I was lucky enough to be in the paddock at the time. The head emerged, and it was bright yellow! I knew immediately something odd was going on.

The cria was alive and vigorous, so I ran back and got the camera to record the event. When I returned the head and legs were out, and moment later an apparently healthy, and very yellow, boy was on the ground.

What is going on here?

The yellow colour was visible because the cria was white, the tint would have been lost against a darker coloured cria. The colour comes from the meconium, the first stool (poo) the cria was born with. Usually the meconium is passed in the first 24 hours after birth, but in this case it has emerged early and filled the space created by the birth membrane. The yellowy-brown colour of the meconium, when spread over the bright white fleece of the newborn cria, looks yellow.

What does it mean? What are the risks?

There is a chance that the labour contractions may have been long and hard, enough that they squeezed the cria's abdomen to the point where the meconium was forced out. So even though the labour had looked normal when I arrived, the cria might have had a more difficult birth than it first appeared.

There is also a chance that the cria might have aspirated (inhaled) some of the meconium. This can lead to acute problems like blocked breathing passages, or it can cause a dangerous infection in the days after birth. You should treat the cria as being "at risk", as though they had come through a difficult/assisted birth.

In this case of our little yellow boy we decided (after a chat with our vet) to give him some prophylactic antibiotics, and we kept a careful eye on him for his first week- making sure he was not running a fever, and that he was feeding well and gaining weight. So if you see a yellow cria, pay extra attention to make sure their unusual birth doesn't turn into a more serious problem. A small preventive action early on can prevent a major disaster later.





China Exports

By Steve Ridout, Western Australian exporter - Wildflower Alpacas and Quarantine Services

The Australian alpaca industry has exported two shipments of breeding stock to China over the previous few months, almost doubling the number shipped last year.

In October 2014, 525 head were exported from Victoria, to China, as a 'one off' shipment, making it the largest number of alpacas to land in the country.

In the last 2 months over 1000 Alpacas departed in two shipments bound for Shenyang and Hohhot China.

"The Chinese are really keen to set up an agriculture industry around the alpaca industry," said Steve Ridout, Western Australian exporter of Wildflower Alpacas and Quarantine Services. "They see a market for the fibre and products."

Last year's stud animals were sourced from Victoria and South Australia, but the latest shipments included alpacas from New South Wales and Western Australia giving a real boost for many Australian alpaca breeders.

Steve Ridout said that while the next shipments of breeding stock are higher in quality compared to last year's, Australian breeders are generally shipping their lesser quality stock to China at this stage.

"The emerging markets will want numbers," he said. "They'll be looking at better quality animals once they establish their market. Our quality will start growing at a higher rate than it

would have, if we were breeding with those animals that we're now exporting to Asia. While shipments to China, Taiwan, Japan and Korea, are ramping up, alpaca exports to Europe have declined by more than 50 per cent over the past eight years. Wildflower Alpacas and Quarantine Services now export between 50 to 70 alpacas to Europe once or twice a year."

"European breeders have sourced some of the best genetics from Australia and New Zealand over the past 10 years, but now demand has slowed we are looking at alternate market places closer to home. The demand from Asia has created a real boost to the Australian industry."

Mr Ridout said he was confident the level of exports to Europe was still sustainable for Australia because of the quality of our genetics, breeders are still willing to pay a premium for this. He said it was important for Australia to help emerging markets, like China, improve the quality of their own herd.

"They spend quite a bit of money importing the alpacas, we need to support them and need the after-market service, which is very beneficial for returned visits and repeat business."

Mr Ridout and a group of industry experts are expected to head to China this month for a seminar where they will assist the Chinese Alpaca Association providing information on breed standards, husbandry, veterinary care, handling and products.

Exports to China were on a shipment by shipment basis but Mr Ridout now advises that the protocol has been signed off by both countries. He is now looking for interested breeders to supply Alpacas for a shipment to China in early 2016.

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Alpaca Services



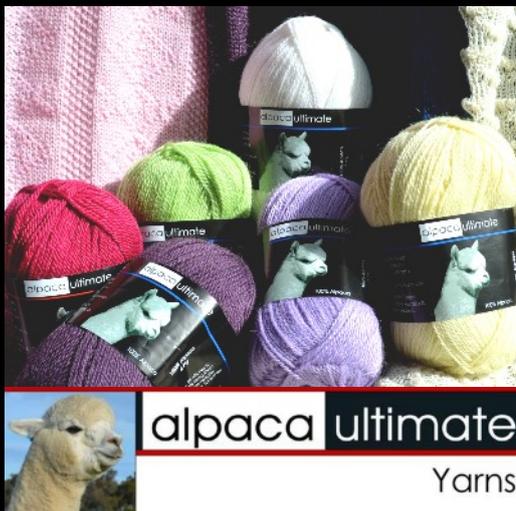
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Agribusiness Ideas: For Australian Alpaca Farmers

By Dinah Fisher



In the weeks preceding the release of the Australian Federal Government's White Paper on Agriculture a number of agribusiness conferences were held around Australia.

Dinah Fisher, AAA Ltd Director whose portfolio responsibilities include Marketing and Promotion and Commercial Farming attended a conference in Sydney entitled "**Maximising Agribusiness Competitiveness**" and has summarised the main themes and ideas presented there for Alpacas Australia readers.

Food security is now a significant global driver in agribusiness. The increasing global population and an expanding global middle class are resulting in increasing demand for greater quantity and quality of food (and fibre) while the context for global agricultural production is one of diminishing resources of arable land and water.

In every Australian agricultural sector production far exceeds the demand in the domestic market and producers must export the surplus to the international market.

The Maximising Agribusiness conference papers were all presented by employees, generally CEOs or other officers of grower organisations with the exception of the Austrade staffer, the Chairman of NORCO, the Executive Director of Boundary Bend and the Managing Director of Fletcher International Exports. All the grower organisations are funded from industry levies. In most cases the levies are compulsory.

Following are the key themes, issues and ideas that emerged from the presentations themselves or the discussion following them. While the conference and therefore the strategies and ideas described were largely about international trade opportunities for Australian agricultural producers, many of them could be applied at a local level for example: collecting industry data, cooperative and collaborative ventures to maximise scale for smaller producers, scholarships, alumni, industry ambassadors, various social media strategies and reverse trade shows.

The Advantages of the co-operative Business Model

A presentation by dairy co-operative Norco, together with the Northern co-operative Meat Company and the Business Council of co-operatives and Mutuals explored the opportunities for farmers inherent in the co-operative business model. Globally 35% of agricultural production is organised on a co-operative basis. In a nut shell, co-operative business structures are a way for smaller producers to reach further down the supply chain in order to maximise their returns.

The advantage of co-operative structures is that they remove middlemen. Other benefits are the capacity for reinvestment in R&D, product development, extension, education and reinvestment on farm and in plant. For example, the Northern Co-operative Meat Company is currently investing in a wet blue hide tanning venture because of the increased cost of doing business overseas. It will be one of only three wet blue hide tanneries in Australia.

The main disadvantage of a co-operative business structure is reduced capacity for capital raising, a problem not unfamiliar to those who participated in the former Australian Alpaca Co-op.

For a successful co-operative business, collaboration across all the growers is essential. Good policies must be in place to ensure equity for all members. In Norco's case the principle is "one member, one vote, one price".

Trends to watch:

- Customers (Coles etc) are starting to focus on security and reliability of supply. In some areas the retail sector is moving to 15 year supply contracts.
- Contracts are also starting to include provisions around 'Australian owned'. Tenure, diplomacy and security all influence business viability and foreign ownership can be a problem, for example, when major overseas investors quit the market suddenly.
- The co-operative business sector is lobbying for a Minister of co-operatives.

How to develop a brand that's appealing to foreign markets

Australia is the third largest cotton exporting country in the world. Cotton has been a significant crop in Australia since around 1960. Cotton Australia is funded from a voluntary levy paid by about 70% of Australia's cotton growers. Individual participants in the levy scheme are listed on the Cotton Australia web site.

The cotton industry has a poor reputation for being a pesticide polluting, water hungry crop. The reality is that considerable R&D has gone into addressing these problems and Australian cotton farmers now produce the highest crop yields in the world. The Australian cotton industry has considerably reduced pesticide applications and increased water efficiency and cotton is now grown from Northern Queensland into Victoria. Their marketing strategy is aimed at getting this "good news" story out to the consumer and the market. It is not enough to talk to the processors and growers. Customers and consumers must also be informed.

Cotton Australia sees its competition as synthetic fibres. They work collaboratively with other international cotton producers through 'Cotton Leads' and the 'Better Cotton Initiative' and with other natural fibre organisations to promote the virtues of natural fibres. Through 'Cotton Leads' Cotton Australia accesses a fashion forecasting service which in turn they use to leverage contact with fashion retailers and influencers. Through the "Better Cotton Initiative" participating cotton growers have been able to obtain a small but growing premium on the price that they are paid for their cotton.

Their outreach program includes exhibiting at international trade fairs and arranging tours to Australian cotton farms for "Cotton Ambassadors" (local and international processors, retailers and influencers) as well as other marketing and promotional activities. The Cotton Australia marketing budget last year was \$200k and it is anticipated that this will be offset by approximately 50% from government grants including an export development grant.

Trends to watch:

- Customer and consumer driven (not processor driven) demand for ethical production and supply chains (eg TESCO, UK)
- The re-emergence of local manufacturing. *"Modern spinning equipment is not labour intensive. Labour costs overseas are increasing"*.
-

Getting export ready through collaboration and communication

Meat and Livestock Australia is rolling out a new brand for Australian producers and exporters. It is envisaged that it will be a complementary brand for all Australian brands adopted by all Australian exporters. The brand is "True Aussie" so far it is only being trialled on red meat exports. There are currently 17 different 'Brand Australia' brands or ways of identifying Australian product in international markets. "True Aussie" will be another. The irony here is that "True Aussie" doesn't seem to have been the product of wide collaboration despite the title of the presentation.

There was some scepticism expressed about the appropriateness of 'True' – was it not true before? And 'Aussie' – does it imply "she'll be right mate" and therefore poor quality and poor customer service? The discussion around this campaign was reminiscent of the critique of Australian Tourism's *"where the bloody hell are you?"* campaign.

Trends to watch

- Consultation must be wide and genuine
- Brands must be quality assured, respected and reliable – reputation is everything

Key areas for grains competitiveness in the international arena

Grain Growers is a member organisation focused on policy, grower engagement, research and development, events and education. It represents 22,000 farm businesses. Grain production in Australia is profitable, generating 4 -6% returns (ABARES). It's an export dominated industry with only 10% of production consumed in the domestic market. Overseas it is competing against heavily subsidised producers. *"We have little market power"*. Since the demise of AWB they need to refocus on quality assurance schemes, rebrand and market.

Trends to watch

- don't be a bulk commodity marketer
- be a price setter not a price taker

Navigating red tape and negotiating protocols

LiveCorp runs a protocol committee for obtaining export protocols (for breeders as well as killers) and develops templates for the protocols. DEFAT is under resourced, down from 4 staff to 1.5 in this area. Industry needs to develop the solutions and deliver to government in an efficient way. Any exporter seeking protocols needs to do the work themselves ie: prepare templates, seek expert veterinary and other necessary advice. The Department input around diplomacy, government to government negotiations and translation services is essential.

Trend to watch:

- Fix it yourself

"If you are going to Canberra because you've got a problem, don't bother to go unless you've also got the solution".

"In Australia we expect government to do too much – I built my own trains to get over the Blue Mountains and into Port Botany from Dubbo". "Business people should solve the problems – not politicians and government".

- Robert Fletcher

Building relationships to maintain and develop markets

The National Farmers Federation presentation focused on four activities:

- Digital enablement
- Branding Australia
- Streamlining projects
- Trade and access

Their vision is to double the value of Australian agriculture by 2030. The priorities that they have identified include:

- Digital connectivity
- Market access
- Human talent
- Flexible sources of capital
- Accelerating productivity
- Premium branding

Gone are the days when everyone had a relative who was on the land. The NFF have identified the disconnect between Australian farmers and urban Australians as a significant threat to Australian agriculture. Next year as part of an effort to restore the positive perception of Australian agriculture in the community and to give Australian farmers a stronger, unified presence and voice, they will roll out a platform known as the Online Farmer Dashboard. Every (member) farmer will have a home page which includes "on farm today: weather, activities, policy, management practices etc. This program is aimed in part at redressing the imbalance between farmers and lobby groups such as Get up, Care 2 and others as well as building the relationship between the country and the city.

NFF priorities for the next free trade agreements are India, Indonesia and the European Union followed by the Gulf States. The Middle East has already been identified as a significant future market for Australian alpaca meat.

The Australian alpaca industry being included in the NFF's free trade negotiations with the EU and the Gulf States in particular could be an advantage to our industry. Australian alpaca farming will always be a relatively small niche industry. Being part of a larger, better resourced representative group of farmers with a larger agenda around the development of agriculture and the public perception of the benefits of farmers and farming could be a major benefit of AAA membership. Certainly if all aspects of the Australian alpaca industry secured free access into the European market it would be of direct benefit not just for direct sales of livestock, fleece, meat and hides to participants in the export market but also for the perception of our industry in Australia and internationally.

Trends to watch:

- Significant uptake of social media for marketing, branding and opinion shaping
- Strategic opportunities around free trade agreements

How Australia is aiming to maximise trade opportunities in the global dairy industry

By global standards the Australian Dairy industry is very efficient thanks in part to R&D investment in pasture research. On average Australian cows consume a diet consisting of 60% pasture – the sweet spot for profitability. The dairy industry works on a continuous improvement model. It strives to be open and transparent on all issues including animal welfare. Dairy Australia is candid with lobby groups, for example acknowledging problems such as welfare issues in dairy husbandry but tracks and can identify the rate at which the industry is improving its performance in such areas for example tail docking.

They have recently developed and adopted a sustainability framework in collaboration with Unilever. This is a world first for the dairy industry and is considered world's best practice. At Dairy Australia sustainability is more than just the environment. It encompasses social responsibility, the 3 p's: planet, people, profit.

Dairy Australia run an International Market Development Program and an industry reference group consisting of major industry members involved in export. The industry aims for compound growth of 2-3% per annum. Every other producer around the world is eyeing off China and SE Asia. As well as participation in trade fairs and Austrade promotions, outreach activities include Dairy scholarships for international buyers and processors to visit Australian dairies and to experience and be immersed in the Australian industry. The scholarship recipients then become Dairy Alumni. The alumni total 650 members to date who have gone on to become ambassadors for the Australian dairy industry, particularly in Japan, China and Korea. Dairy Australia also produce a regular newspaper, the Dairy Australian which is distributed in Australia and overseas and run 'Legendairy' an engaging social media campaign on Facebook.

Trends to watch out for:

- Customers including social responsibility criteria (SR1 in the European Union) in contracts
- Sustainability frameworks as part of strategic planning in agribusinesses
- Outreach programs connecting product and producers to consumers

Australia's agricultural competitiveness from the customer perspective

According to Austrade the 20th century model for trade was based on commodities. It was price driven and the thinking was short term. The 21st century trade model is about long term thinking, building relationships with customers and consumers, differentiating products and building reliable integrated supply chains.

Australia can produce for a population of 60 million people – our immediate international markets have a middle class of 500 million thus Australian products should be positioned as:

- Aspirational choices
- Premium products

Austrade advice is that growers should leverage integrity, quality, authenticity and reliability. Tell a compelling story to consumers about your product and most of all deliver what customers want. Australia is not alone in claiming the environmental high ground. All our competitors (eg NZ, USA, Canada and others) claim to be clean, green and safe and they are all held in high regard in the same markets (China and SE Asia).

The broader offer from Australia which is recognised as a regional centre of excellence can include:

- Equipment
- Technology
- Systems
- Services (education and research)
- Quality inputs
- Investment opportunities
- Bulk commodities
- Premium products

Trends to watch for:

- The “new” silk road
- Building relationships with trade partners

“Asia, the Subcontinent and the Middle East are all emerging markets for Australia. Qatar is the richest country in the world and it imports 90% of its food”.

Trade and export development in the Australian vegetable industry

Ausveg represents 15,000 Australian vegetable growers. It manages and distributes their levies across a range of activities including R&D and market development.

Current production levels in Australian horticulture represent an over supply of 25% based on current domestic consumption. Current exports represent 7% of total product so there is a pressing need to develop export markets. Only 1% of Australian exports go to China and China is also a competitive threat to Australian growers exporting to the Middle East. Ausveg organises seminars and conferences on export opportunities for their growers and as part of their outreach program they run reverse trade missions where overseas buyers visit growers and farms in Australia.

Tracking industry data is an issue, the world now moves very quickly and data is required monthly. ABARES figures are reliable but ABS is increasingly less useful as that department has been significantly reduced in recent years.

Trend to watch for:

- Measure your industry, know its value and potential

Applying a structured market development frame work to identify market viability

The Australian Macadamia Nut Growers Society represents 800 growers with 18,000 hectares under 6 million trees. Australia is now the world’s largest producer of macadamias and only 7% of

the Australian crop is consumed in the domestic market. Last year the Society celebrated its 40th Anniversary. The Society’s activities are funded from industry levies.

The speaker was and is the first Market Development Manager for the Australian Macadamia Nut Growers Society and has been working for the Society for 5 years. She was responsible for managing the project to introduce the ‘Australian Macadamia’ brand, developing an international export strategy for the growers and launching it in South Korea. Her very first task was to get the then 14 Australian macadamia exporters around a table to understand and agree that their competition was actually growers overseas and that they needed to cooperate and collaborate with each other and share IP if they were going to grow the Australian Macadamia nut industry. Once mustered the group agreed to develop a coordinated approach to access the export market and made the decision to focus their initial effort on the South Korean market so that they would be ready to launch in South Korea when the free trade agreement with South Korea was announced.

Trends to watch for:

- Measure your industry, know its value and potential
- Work collaboratively and cooperatively to identify and maximise the benefits presented by strategic opportunities such as free trade agreements

Alpaca farming in Australia is now an emerging niche agribusiness opportunity based on the sound development and sale of elite genetics, luxury fibre and premium meat. The Australian national herd is variously estimated as being between 170,000 head – the number of alpacas on the register or over 300,000 – at best a guess also based on the number of registered alpacas vis a vis an estimate of the unregistered alpacas. We know that Australia is now a net exporter of alpacas.

Our industry is small with less than 2000 members of the Association and a revenue stream to AAA Ltd of less than one million dollars. We have one fulltime employee and three part time employees. To resource outreach activities such as marketing, promotion and public as well as grower education we are reliant on the largely volunteer work of ourselves as members.

Some members have suggested that a mature industry will generate a revenue stream based on industry levies. It is time to work together to measure, quantify and scope our industry to set goals. In order to prosper from the opportunities presented by strategies such as free trade agreements, international trade missions in global as well as local markets, we must demonstrate the Australian alpaca industry value and returns to new entrants, government agencies, the media and others.

If we are to grow our market, leverage opportunities such as export development and other industry grants, generate revenue from sources such as industry levies and position our industry to prosper in the world market we must align ourselves with the agribusiness sector and take a more mature approach to doing business.

Commercial Opportunities For Alpaca Fleece

By Rebecca & Darren Hard - Ashbourne Alpacas - Woodend Victoria



"We are convinced that there is a strong future for Australian Alpaca Fibre at many levels for producers."

Being relative newcomers to the alpaca industry, we have always had a keen focus on the end use products of these wonderful animals we have chosen to breed. Since commencing our stud in 2009, we have been interested in the commercial opportunities for alpaca fleece and the products that could be created from these fleeces. Having a herd size of around 100 animals at any one time; we have been interested to research how to make the best of our own clip each year, and have therefore been focused on small scale production opportunities to value add with our own fleeces.

Earlier this year we had the opportunity to visit the UK, and as part of this trip, we were excited to have a look at a couple of businesses who are producing this type of value add alpaca product.

First stop was to visit a mini mill business in Lincolnshire - Farrlacey Mill. Elaine has owned and operated the mill since October 2005 and has invested heavily in creating a medium size operation with multiple full lines for production of rovings and yarns. She has also invested in equipment to enable high end woven fabrics as well as producing beautiful doonas which she is selling across Europe. She employs 5-6 passionate staff who are all dedicated to producing premium alpaca product across a number of different categories. It is interesting to note that relative to the size of the national herd in the UK versus Australia, there are many more local mill opportunities for producers to access in Britain than at home.

The next stop on our trip, was to visit the very well known Toft Alpaca Shop in Dunchurch. Toft alpacas have long been a business we have admired from afar and it was the perfect opportunity to visit their farm and see exactly how they have set up their operation. Kerry Lord has focused on creating a business that sells finished yarn products for those crafters who enjoy knitting and crocheting. Toft Alpaca Shop is situated within the Toft Alpaca farm, and combines the best of the animals with a complete knitting workshop experience. Kerry has in particular focused on the new emerging contemporary customer who is looking for beautiful knitting kits along with opportunities to attend classes.

Online retailing is an integral part of their business. Toft Alpacas were reported to process 6,500 kilos of fleece in 2012* and continue to sell kits and yarns around the world.

The Toft Alpaca Shop commenced in 2006 and has taken advantage of creating a full agritourism business, with their store and cafe sitting within the farm grounds. Workshops not only target those wanting to learn a new craft, but also give customers an opportunity to get up close and personal with the alpacas themselves.

So what of commercial fleece opportunities for Australian alpaca?

Having a background in women's fashion retail, we have also spent some time talking to key contacts over the past 12 months, around the commercial fleece bale opportunities for Australian Alpaca. In particular this has been in relation to selling into those markets that create the majority of the world's knitwear products, namely Hong Kong and China.

Alpaca has continued over the past few years to grow in importance for knitwear designers around the world. Starting as a premium yarn used at the high end designer level, it is now used widely in the middle market as a fibre added to other materials including merino yarns. Alpaca has grown in prominence due not only to the qualities of the fibre itself, but also due to the bad press Angora



has been receiving in recent months as a result of questions around the ethics of sourcing this fibre. As such Alpaca is predicted to increase in demand into the future. Australian Alpaca appears relatively unknown by the yarn mills in Hong Kong & China, with current alpaca bales mostly sourced from Peru. South America has currently the strongest and most established relationship with these larger yarn mills, indicating that there is definite opportunity to continue to market the quality of Australian Alpaca within China. This obviously can only be driven and marketed if we can guarantee supply and therefore the current trials working to combine bales of fleece from smaller producers, are really important if we are to focus on a long term commercially viable fleece industry.

We are convinced that there is a strong future for Australian Alpaca Fibre at many levels for producers. There are enormous opportunities for those targeting the craft market whether it be by value add yarns, rovings or even fleeces for hand spinners & felters.

For those producers who choose not to invest in value adding their own fleeces being part of a commercial bale program will be really important to support the growth and development of long term sustainable opportunity for alpaca fibre.

(*Source - Cameron Holt - A definitive guide to Alpaca Fibre)

Darren & Rebecca Hard own and operate "Ashbourne Alpacas" which comprises a herd of around 100 huacayas in Woodend, Victoria. They have recently opened their first on-line store showcasing their range of knitting yarns and kits that can be visited at www.ashbournealpacayarn.com.au.



Brisbane Royal 2015

The 2015 Brisbane Royal was held from the 7th to the 16th of August and began with Fleece Judging prior to the commencement of the show. There were 62 fleeces entered and judged by Andrew Munn. Pauline Glassser and her fleece display team did a great job at assisting Andrew and then displaying the fleeces.

The fleece winners were:

Softfoot Ninovan SM ET – Champion Huacaya Fleece
Softfoot Royal Prince ET – Reserve Champion Huacaya Fleece
Ivory Park Candy 2 – Champion Suri Fleece
Ivory Park Silky Oak - Reserve Champion Suri Fleece

Congratulations to the winning breeders.

This year we transported the AAA National Alpaca display units to Brisbane and we occupied a great space in the Education area with several thousand people visiting us each day of the show.

We received many accolades on the quality of the display and we were a "stamp site" for the school children wanting to enter a competition. Hectic for the people manning the display but a great way to get the alpaca message out to the public.

Halter judging was conducted on the last weekend of the Ekka and we had 82 entries. Down on previous year unfortunately, but Jillian Holmes made the day lots of fun and the feedback was very positive, so hopefully some of those that missed the day will return next year.

The winners of the halter judging were:

Sharalandan Park Adonis – Supreme Champion Suri
Sunline Maxim – Supreme Champion Huacaya

Congratulations to the winning breeders.

Junior events were held on the Sunday with some newcomers doing very well in the judging. Champion Junior Judge was Hannah Doyle. Congratulations Hannah.



Supreme Huacaya & Supreme Suri



Jillian adding a few laughs to the judging

Workshops for new breeders.

The Program.

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

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

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

Learn how to establish a successful alpaca business plan.

The Venue.

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2015 Perth Royal Show

By Ron Raynor



Supreme Champion Fleece Kurrawa Legends Challenge - Faversham Alpacas



Supreme Champion Huacaya Softfoot Leyland ET - Banksia Park Alpacas

HUACAYAS

The wedding presents came early for Banksia Park Manager and co-owner Sophie Jackson when she collected four Championship trophies along with the Supreme Championship Huacaya award which went to their Softfoot Leyland ET. Sophie will be married to Ross Stacey among the alpacas at her parents Jenny and George Jackson's picturesque property in Serpentine on 17 October. Their Championship wins started in the Junior Female section with BP GRNS Silka, followed by BP PXS Tempest as the Champion Intermediate Female, Softfoot Leyland the Senior Male Champion and BP VCK Colorado ET scoring yet another Championship win as the Mature Male Champion.

To cap off a great Show, Banksia Park then won the coveted Huacaya Sires Progeny award with a magnificent group of three young alpacas sired by their Blackgate Lodge Snowmaster to add to his progeny win at the National Show two weeks earlier.

Experienced breeders, but first time Royal show exhibitors, Liz and Piers Benwell showed that perseverance with their breeding programme is starting to pay off with their Morganleah Jouie taking out the Junior Male Champion award despite having only returned from the long trip to the national show in Sydney and back a few days earlier.

The aptly named Swan Valley Sonoma showed that his Junior Champion success at the national show in Sydney and the long trip back across the Nullabor Plain to WA had not taken anything away from the quality of his fleece when he won the Intermediate Champion Male award for his proud owners Ron and Rose Reid.

Toffee Woods Magica continued on her winning way with success for her owner Melinda Brown as this year's Adult Female Champion following her success at last year's Royal Show as the Champion Intermediate female.

Sue and Jim Wiltshire of Faversham Alpacas were quickly rewarded from following their studmaster Brett Fallon's recommendation when their newly acquired male, Kurrawa Legends Challenge was successful as the Adult Male Champion. His first fleece had earlier in the day won Champion Junior Huacaya Fleece, Supreme Champion Fleece and Best Commercial fleece. He looks sure to add to the increasing array of top quality males now available to breeders in Western Australia.

Kallaroo Park Mikko made the trip up from Albany rewarding for her owners Mahlon and Deb Hotker when she won the Senior Female Champion award to add to their many earlier trophies at previous shows.

Larissa Simmonds Querida Park alpacas dominated the Mature Female section and her QP Izzabella showed that being 141 months old doesn't necessarily mean you can't still have lovely fine and crimped fleece.

The incredible line-up of mature males was like a showcase of the range of top stud huacaya males available in Western Australia, most of who were previous Supreme show winners, eventually resulted in the 99 month old Banksia Park Colorado being judged this year's Champion Mature Male.



Supreme Champion Suri Fleece Surilana Idol - Pitwillow Alpacas



Supreme Champion Suri Bedrock Cryptic - Bedrock Alpacas

SURIS

Bedrock Alpacas owners, Chris and Tara Ravenhill capped off a memorable 12 months with their male suri Bedrock Cryptic, when he took out his 5th Suri SUPREME champion award for 2015. His remarkable journey started with being crowned 2014 WA Suri of the Year and then in 2015 Supreme Champion wins at the Sydney Royal Show, the WA Whiteman Park show, the Giddegannup show and the WA Colorbration show, plus a Reserve Champion award and Best White at the 2015 National Show. Add to this, their wins with Bedrock Carter as Intermediate male champion, Bedrock Charlotte as Adult female champion and it's easy to see why they were such happy people during the show. Or perhaps it was because Chris and Tara had co-ordinated yet another successful Perth Royal Show for WA breeders.

Eversprings Alpacas owners, Gwyne and John Bell, continued their success with Suri alpacas when their Eversprings Tawney won the Junior male champion title and Eversprings Tiana taking out the Intermediate female champion trophy.

Popular hard workers for the association in WA, Mick Pitcher and Gail Williams from Pitwillow Alpacas, started the day in the best fashion with their Pitwillow Shadow taking out the Champion Junior Female suri award shortly after they had won the 2015 SUPREME Suri Fleece award with the fleece shorn from her Sire, Surilana Idol. The fleece had been shorn at the 2014 Perth Royal Show after Idol had won the 2014 Royal Show Supreme Suri award. Their Show finished in the best possible way when two groups of Surilana Idol progeny were placed 1st and 2nd in the Suri Sires Progeny competition.

Wendy and Kevin Lawn from Lawitwick alpacas tasted success again with their Marmagon Monique in the Champion Senior Female award, while Marmagon Monaro, now owned by Chris and Stan Pietraszok of Christian Alpacas, took out the Champion Senior male Suri award.

The full results of the 2015 Perth Royal Show can be found in the "Latest Show Results" section of the WA Region website at wa.alpaca.asn.au

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SAVE THE DATE



Alpaca Association
NEW ZEALAND

AANZ National Show

7th, 8th, 9th
October 2016
in Christchurch

2015 Royal Adelaide Show

By Lea Richens
Councillor, Royal Agricultural & Horticultural Society of SA Inc
Supervisor, Alpaca Section

2015 featured a most successful Royal Adelaide Show with the second highest number of overall competitive entries ever.

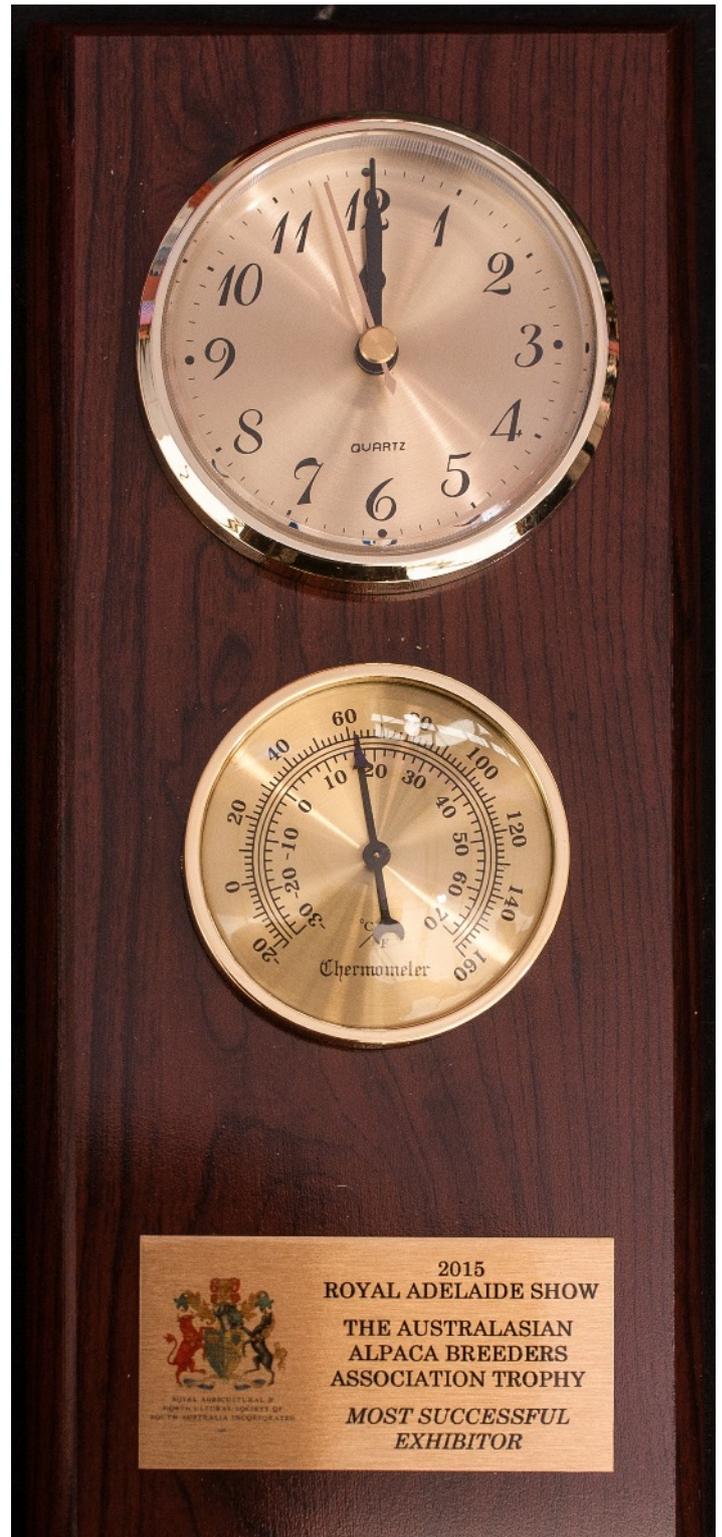
Despite miserable weather early in the piece, crowds over the ten day show numbered close to 500,000. Pre show dramas again marred the alpaca section, and the clashing of an AAA feature event with our Royal Adelaide Show yet again, this time the National Show and Sale, presented additional challenges.

Nonetheless I can report a successful, well organized and smooth running event over all alpaca sections. Judges Natasha Clark and Marc Mullett worked in tandem to ensure high standards and consistency with valuable feedback through their engaging commentaries. Their expertise and professionalism helped guarantee a good atmosphere throughout the three judging days.

Congratulations to all ribbon and award winners, and in particular Ambersun Alpacas (Supreme Champion Huacaya and Most Successful Exhibitor), Marquez Alpacas (Grand Champion Suri and Suri Fleece), Softfoot Alpacas (Grand Champion Huacaya Fleece) and Triple G Alpacas (Most Successful New Exhibitor).



Supreme Champion Huacaya - Ambersun Rip Curl



Highlights from our 2015 Royal Adelaide Show Alpaca Section included last year's Junior Handler winner, Georgia Pillen, progressing to the next level and taking out the 2015 Junior Judge award; the alpaca fleeces, carefully displayed in our impressive glass fronted cabinets, making for a great visual display; a large, impressive group of alpacas drawing the attention of huge crowds during two Grand Parades on the main arena; and the shearing team whose demonstrations again attracted large audiences, as did the shorn alpacas when returned to their pens within the Pavilion.

Thank you to our stewards and marshals who, with valued assistance from the Urrbrae Agricultural High School students, continued to impress with their teamwork and expertise. To the veterinarian inspection team, to our generous sponsors and to the three breeders who provided an alpaca presence throughout the whole ten show days – a huge thank you.

Royal Adelaide Show Results are available on AAA SA Region's website - www.aaasa.com.au/



Mark Short busy shearing an alpaca from the Composite Classes



Grand Champion Suri - Marquez Luciano



Winners are grinners. Winners of the Junior Handler Classes with most Successful Junior Handler, Alya-Sophie Qualischefski and Adrienne Clarke from Ambersun Alpacas, sponsors of Junior Handler section.



Making Babies - Making History

By Tracy Bell

Looking back on the Australian breakthroughs in commercial embryo transfer that changed the alpaca world.

Today, Australia's alpaca show rings are crowded with embryo transfer (ET) babies who grew to be champions. At the 2015 National Show and Sale just gone you could see, throughout the programme, the pedigree and the history of the commercial ET techniques pioneered with Australian ingenuity.

Among the many names were, Millpaca Sister Act ET, Softfoot Casstalas MD ET, Yaringa Amira ET, Kurrawa Sumthin Sweet ET, Malakai Celebrity ET and Baarrooka Supreme Rosanna ET. We see it at all shows, because those now very familiar letters are strongly written into so many of the elite bloodlines in the Australian and world alpaca industries.

A SPECIAL DELIVERY

The birth of the world's first group of commercially conceived embryo transfer cria was announced from Victoria's Benleigh Alpaca Stud near Geelong in 2002.

The four newly arrived babies were a joy for alpaca breeders around the world and a groundbreaking achievement that partnered locally advanced animal science with quality Australian farming.



Bellarine vet Dr David Hopkins, a pioneer in horse and cattle ET transfers, and Dr Jane Vaughan, who holds a PhD in the reproductive physiology of alpaca females had asked leading breeders Allan and Carolyn Jinks to be a part of the embryo transfer trial they hoped would change the future.

Benleigh's Allan Jinks explains their motivation for joining the research that finally found a way around the breeding limitations of the alpaca's long gestation period.

"We knew ET from other livestock and it was vitally important for our industry to be able to speed up the breeding of elite animals in the same way," Mr Jinks said.



"We all came together to tackle the challenging physiology of alpaca reproduction," Dr Vaughan explained. "The induced, rather than cyclical, ovulation of alpacas was one of the obstacles that had kept camelids like alpaca from the commercial ET success that had come much more easily to other livestock industries."

After being encouraged by news of a recent successful embryo transfer in Middle Eastern camels, David Hopkins invited Dr Vaughan to join him in alpaca ET research.

They combined their talents in 2000 and offered ET commercially to Benleigh in 2001 – it was successful on the first attempt.

When the four cria from those first embryo transfers were born the following year there were many proud announcements in the media.

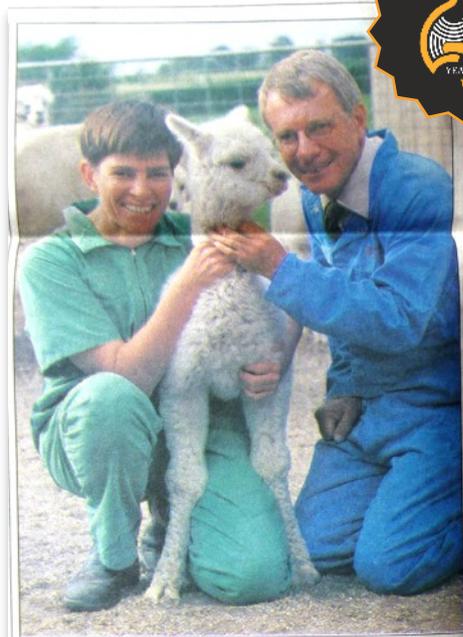
"Vets make world first in alpaca breeding"
(Geelong Advertiser, May 2002)

"Seeing the first embryo flushed and ready for implanting was an amazing experience," Carolyn Jinks recalled, still with some awe.

"One female had produced two embryos therefore we were faced with four embryos and only three recipients. So, Benleigh Morena became a donor and recipient on the same day."

Morena's delivery of an ET cria was described as a serendipitous event that demonstrated the flushing technique used by the Australian vets was not only gentle on the embryo but gentle on the donor as well.

The first recipient mother at the Victorian stud delivered her cria 293 days after transfer - Benleigh Recital - a female arriving on February 2, 2002. The next three births were all boys - El Toro, El Toledo and Ramada - with the final two of



TOP BREED: Veterinarians Jane Vaughan and David Hopkins with El Toledo, which was born after an embryo transfer on the Bellarine Peninsula. Photo: TONY KERRIGAN

Vets make world first in alpaca breeding

AN alpaca born through embryo transfer under paddock herd conditions is a world first for two Geelong veterinarians and a local alpaca stud.

It is one of three cria now on the ground at the Benleigh Alpaca Stud on the Bellarine Peninsula.

Fertilised embryos were flushed from quality females and injected into the uterus of lesser quality fleece mothers, with two cria already born and the

donor mother to have her own next month.

The successful commercial herd project is the work of Dr David Hopkins from Bellarine Veterinary Clinic, already a pioneer in cattle and horse transfers, Dr Jane Vaughan of Geelong, a doctor of philosophy in alpaca reproduction, and stud owners Allan and Carolyn Jinks, who have been breeding alpacas since 1989.

The two veterinarians

have received a research grant into the possibilities of artificial insemination of alpacas.

Dr Hopkins said yesterday it had taken more than five years to understand the reproduction cycle of alpacas sufficiently to achieve embryo transplant.

This weekend the Australian Alpaca Association will present the first Alpaca Fest 2002 at the Geelong Showgrounds.

—BARRY COTTON



Carolyn & Allan Jinks

those cria born at 332 days gestation. As the four embryos had been implanted on the same day, this showed the natural variations in gestation time.

"All newborns are little miracles, but it was exciting to know we had been involved in the world's first commercial ET program in alpacas," Carolyn said when asked about Benleigh's part in accelerating genetic improvement in alpacas breeding.

GIVING BIRTH TO ET

Getting to commercial embryo transfer in livestock began back in 1890 when English scientist Walter Heape successfully transferred rabbit embryos.

During the 1930s and 1940s, research was conducted around the world in sheep and goats and ET emerged in the North American cattle industry in the early 1970s.

(2009 Group Project 1 – UNSW Embryology)

Dr Vaughan said initial surgical attempts at embryo transfer in alpacas were made in Peru in the 1960s and 1970s. Non-surgical techniques were developed in the 1980s and evolved globally over the next decade with the advent of ultrasound techniques.

MAKING MORE BABIES

As the first news of the Benleigh cria was going around the world, George and Jenny Jackson from Banksia Park Alpacas in Western Australia invited Jane Vaughan across the Nullarbor to start an ET programme for them. It was there where Dr Vaughan's research on multiple ovulation embryo transfer (MOET), or superovulation, became a reality.

"David Hopkins and I had spent 2002 and 2003 working on MOET protocols and Jenny was interested in its logistical benefits and potential for even greater acceleration of herd quality," Dr Vaughan recalled.

"At the time, many people feared the technique thinking if you superovulated alpacas you would just 'burn' them, make them infertile," Jenny Jackson said highlighting how pioneering the research was.

"I think having George, who is a vet, gave us the confidence to use our herd in the trial because he understood the process and could manage the doses in the drug programme."

"Happily, all the girls we multiple ovulated went on to have normally conceived babies for many years afterwards."

The recipient mothers with champion cria at foot in the Banksia Park maternity paddock may not match up to their offspring in fleece traits, or ears, or jaws, or other things but Jenny says they are all very special.

"Each one of our recipient females has a history of being an excellent mother who conceives and gives birth easily and they are chosen to carry embryos from the top 10% of our herd," Jenny said.

"In our first full year of superovulation we had 150 ET offspring, and having quality in those numbers really put us on the map."



Banksia Park Khan ET

One birth achieved particular fame – the 2005 National Supreme Champion Banksia Park Khan ET. Khan was the first ET progeny in Australia to win a National Supreme ribbon and he went on to sell for a record price of \$187,000.

WHAT THE WORLD WANTED TO KNOW

Accelerating the quality of alpaca herds was a world endeavour and the commercial successes in Australia brought researchers here to further their own knowledge of embryo transfer techniques.

The Australian government also funded a mission to Peru that allowed Jane Vaughan and David Hopkins to run embryo transfer training sessions requested by Peruvian vets and breeders. Peru was looking to boost the country's ET programmes that would allow them to share high quality genetics more evenly through their herds, particularly by getting greater numbers of quality stud males to the more traditional breeders. (Geelong Advertiser, Nov 20 2007)

In 2008, the World Alpaca Conference was held in Sydney and embryo transfer was a major topic and Australia's achievements in alpaca reproduction were reported with the media headline 'Embryos give alpaca industry new life'. (The Land, March 27 2008)

Benleigh El Toledo and his ET siblings, and Banksia Park Khan ET were then, and even now, the most talked about animals in the land of alpaca science and reproduction.

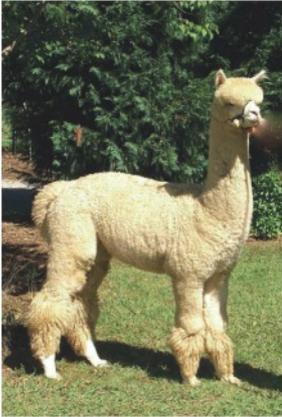
Other ET alpacas who became Supreme Champions at the National Huacaya: 2008 - Shanbrooke Accoyo Prodigy ET, 2011 - Shanbrooke Accoyo Ruling Eyes ET

Suri: 2007 - Surilana Mister B. ET, 2008 - Surilana Lady Columbine ET, 2009 - Kurrawa Tari Q ET.



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Interpreting The AAA Fleece Score Card

By Angela Preuss on behalf of the Showing & Judging Committee

What should be entered for fleece judging?

The classes for fleece entries at shows are titled, "skirted fleece". This simply means that the fleece has been "sorted" by the exhibitor before it is presented to be judged. As far as possible, ALL of the fleece presented should have very similar micron, very similar length, same colour etc... This is why there are so many sections on the scorecard that reward uniformity. Ultimately it means that some of the fleece shorn from the alpaca will need to be removed from the fleece before it is presented to be judged.

The purchaser of a particular fleece or line of fleeces would not want to find a great variance in quality, micron, length and style. Think of a show fleece as "one item" of very similar attributes. Any fleece that is different in micron, style, colour, length etc should have already been removed.

How do new breeders know how to skirt a fleece?

Learning to skirt a fleece means getting to recognise the variances within a fleece. Being present at a lot of shearings and attending courses will help in this recognition. If you imagine the area covered by the saddle on a horse – then it is usually just this "saddle" area in alpacas that should be shown. This is not to say that the fleece from other areas may not have some use or value – they just do not belong with the skirted saddle. The belly and apron areas in particular are usually higher in micron and have a higher guard hair content and the neck fleece is usually shorter than the saddle area and should definitely be removed.

As a general rule, this desirable "saddle area" is larger in younger and higher quality alpacas, where even the upper leg areas may be included. However, with older animals and with lower quality animals, this "saddle" area usually reduces and more fleece will need to be excluded to maintain uniformity.

The new shearing practice of "saddle first" is very beneficial in simplifying the skirting process. With this method, the shearer removes the saddle before removing the legs, belly, neck etc. In this way, the owner can deal with, (sort, store etc) the saddle without the worry of contamination by fibre from the legs, bellies etc.. However, just because the shearer removes the saddle first, this does not mean that it will not need some extra skirting before being sent to a show. If any coarse guard hairs, second cuts etc are not removed, they can scatter amongst the fleece during storage and be almost impossible to remove later. Therefore, if time allows, it is optimal to skirt a saddle for showing as much as possible before it is stored.

What fleeces should be shown?

Your highest quality alpacas will produce your best fleeces for showing. It is optimal to shear at the time of year before grass seeds, burrs and dry and dusty conditions contaminate the fleece. It is beneficial if you can identify your highest quality animals and clean them up as much as possible before shearing. It is much easier to remove vegetable matter from a fleece while it is still on the animal, rather than after it is removed.



This is an example of a fleece that has been stored before skirting properly. Second cuts and coarse fibres have now contaminated the fleece and can be difficult to remove.



This is "saddle first" shearing, where the saddle is removed first



This exhibitor has left some coarse fibres in amongst the saddle fleece. This fleece will lose points in the "uniformity of micron" section, (as well as the "lack of guard hair" and "character" sections).

1. Clean fleece weight score (15 points)

This score is the same for both suri and huacaya.

This is an objective score that is not decided by the judge. This score should remain the same at each show for any particular fleece. Points for fleece weight are calculated according to a pre set measurement scale. This scale can be found in the AAA Showing Rules Manual. There is a different scale for both suri and huacaya and varies in age bands. Weighing of the fleeces is done by the stewards prior to the judging. Each fleece is weighed and the weight is then calculated to 12 months, (annualized). This annualisation is done so that within each section, fleeces with less growth (in months) are not disadvantaged.

This section is out of 15 points and the scores will vary greatly. Some exhibitors may feel tempted to include areas other than the saddle in the show fleece, to try and increase their weight score. However any skirtings left in a show fleece will incur penalties in the sections below and will rarely score well. Judges do not look favorably on high weight, poorly skirted fleeces and will be reluctant to place them well. We also have to bear in mind, that ribbon

winning fleeces will usually be displayed to the public. To emerge as a well respected fleece industry, we need to be mindful of our products that are presented to the public and keep them to a high standard. Therefore you are greatly encouraged to skirt your fleeces well before judging. Thankfully, we are seeing a lot of improvement in this area

Sections on the fleece scorecard

A scorecard is completed for every fleece shown. The scorecards vary slightly between suri and huacayas and the total score is out of 100. After judging, a completed score card will be displayed with every fleece.

2. Fineness (15 points)

This score is the same for both suri and huacaya.

In Large Shows

In larger shows, all fleeces are sent away to be micron tested before the show. This is usually done by a grid test, where a number of samples are removed from various areas of the entire fleece to find the average micron from the entire fleece. The micron is then interpreted on the appropriate scale for age and breed and a score out of 15 is then allocated for fineness. These charts can be found in the AAA Showing Rules Manual. When fleeces have been skirted well and coarse fibres have been removed, then exhibitors are generally pleased with this measurement. However, if fleeces are not skirted well and coarse fibre areas are left in the fleece, then this will increase the average micron and lower the fineness score considerably.

In Smaller Shows

In smaller shows, the judge will estimate the micron and use the appropriate chart to allocate a fineness score out of 15. Once again, poorly skirted fleeces will be penalized. The judge for example may estimate the fineness of the saddle to be 20 micron. However, if areas of coarse fibre have not been removed, then the judge may increase this micron score to reflect the fact that much higher micron fibre is present. This will increase the average micron estimation and reduce the fineness score.

3. Handle (5 points)

This score is the same for both suri and huacaya.

This is a subjective measurement by the judge. The judge may assess the handle of each fleece when it is judged. Alternatively, the judge may walk along all the exhibits and compare the variance in handle amongst all the exhibits in that class and allocate points accordingly.

The "handle" refers to the level of softness to the touch. One of the most pleasing attributes of alpaca fleece is its softness. The suri should have a beautiful, silky slippery handle.

6. Uniformity of colour (5 POINTS)

This score is the same for both suri and huacaya.

Commercial processors are generally looking for only solid coloured fleeces with no colour contamination. If a fleece has no colour variance it will receive maximum points in this section. A judge will look for dark or light coloured fibres along the staple and points will be deducted for this, as well as any colour variance throughout the fleece.

If any belly or brisket area fibre is left in with dark coloured fleeces, it is always easily identified as it is usually a lighter shade. These areas should always be removed before showing. If it looks different OR feels different – then remove it!

Roan and grey fleeces are not as reliant on solid colour for their value and different consideration is given to them in this section. However, large spots and variances should be removed.

7. Character (10 points)

Huacaya only

In this section, points are allocated for good definition in the crimp style. Crimp is a trait of maximum fleece production in huacaya. Ideally, the staple should have an aligned and a well defined crimp style from tip to base which should be evident across the entire fleece. Some fleeces only have “areas” of good style and much plainer areas. Judges are assessing for both good AND consistent style.

In the AAA judging manual, points for this section are allocated as:

Very well defined crimp: 9/10 points
Good definition and crimp: 7/8 points
Average definition/crimp: 5/6 points
Poor/plain definition/crimp: 2/4/points
Straight fibred: 0/1 points



Huacaya fleece showing excellent character and style

8. Style (10 points)

Suris only

There are many suri lock styles and the AAA Suri Breed Standard does not identify any one lock style as being the ideal. However, judges are looking for a “well defined” lock, which will “hold” the attributes that are desirable in a suri. An open style of lock, usually indicates lack of density, and encourages vegetable matter contamination.



A suri fleece showing excellent style and lustre

9. Density (5 POINTS)

This score is the same for both suri and huacaya.

With both huacaya and suri fleeces, density is very desirable. When evaluating individual alpacas, breeders should not only be concentrating on desirable fleece traits, but also on the quantity of quality fleece that each alpaca can produce.

Some fleeces that judges are presented with are very “big”, (take up a lot of space). However they may have low weight compared to their volume. What judges are looking for are compact fleeces, with high weight per volume. A dense alpaca will yield more fleece at each shearing, which is highly desirable.

In huacaya fleeces, it is optimal to feel fleeces where the staples are firm and not easily compressed when squeezed between the fingers. The staples should not feel spongy.

High quality suri is a heavy fleece, should be compact and take up a small space for a high weight. Many people have been astonished when lifting a bag of suri fleece to realize that it weighs a lot more than initially realized.

Convenors often have the “problem” of displaying the champion suri fleeces, as they tend to disappear in the display boxes! The



Both of these suri fleeces weigh the same. The brown fleece on the right is an open fleece with less density and will not score well in the "density" and "style" sections. The white fleece is a dense and heavy fleece which is far more desirable.

convenors often use "tricks", such as putting balloons and cellophane under the champion suri fleeces to make them look like they are "more"! Exhibitors of suri fleeces should never be discouraged that their fleeces seem "small". It may be just an indication that they are very dense!

10. Brightness (10 points)

Huacaya only

Brightness is very desirable in huacaya and contributes to the silky handle in the finished product. A dull fleece may often have all the other desirable attributes, but the silky soft handle will be lacking. Brightness is a good indicator of a well aligned fleece, that refracts light and handles beautifully.

In the AAA judging manual, points for this section are allocated as:

High sheen: 9/10 points
 Good Sheen : 7/8 points
 Average sheen: 4/6 points
 Poor/dull sheen: 0/3 points



A lovely bright huacaya fleece that will score well in the "brightness" section.

11. Lustre (15 points)

Suri only.

Lustre is the hallmark of suri fleece. Lustrous fleeces feel silky and luxurious. The final suri product should have lustre, drape and an amazing handle. Chalky and dry suri fleeces are undesirable. Judges are particularly looking for this important trait in suri fleece judging and it is weighted higher in scoring than huacaya "brightness". At some times, the "best" suri fleeces can be greasy and well locked. Judges need to open the locks to reveal all the qualities, (including the lustre). It is a bit like opening the oyster to reveal the pearl! Once the lustre is revealed it is unmistakable! A judge doesn't need to find lustre, it finds the judge!

In the AAA judging manual, points for this section are allocated as:

High lustre: 14/15 points
 Good lustre: 11/13 points
 Average lustre: 6/10 points
 Dull/poor lustre 0/5 points

12. Lack of guard hair (10 points IN HUACAYA AND 5 POINTS IN SURI)

All alpacas will have some guard hair.

However, it is an undesirable trait and judges are looking for fleeces that have low guard hair. Guard hair is the straight, coarse hair that is most concentrated in the brisket and belly areas. Fleece from these areas should definitely be removed before showing. However, guard hair is also distributed throughout the saddle fleece. Judges are looking to reward fleeces that have low levels of guard hair. It is also more desirable to have a fleece where there is not too much variance in micron between the secondary and primary fibres.

Many of us have alpaca garments with guard hair. These hairs mostly do not dye well and protrude from the garment. The less

guard hair that we can produce in alpacas and alpaca garments the better! Thankfully, in recent times, there are many more high quality garments, using alpaca fleece with little or no guard hair being produced.

Guard hair can be detected easily. If the fibres of a staple are spread on a contrasting background, guard hairs are very visible as they are stronger in micron and straighter. If guard hair levels are very high, they will be clearly evident without even opening a staple. Guard hairs under good lighting often look quite "synthetic" as they refract light differently.

Often guard hairs will be most evident in staples/locks from the perimeter of the saddle that are pointed at the tips. If you pull the tips of these pointed ended staples, usually many coarse guard hairs may be pulled out. These high guard hair, pointed staple locks should not be included in the saddle which is being shown.



Lustre in suris is a highly desirable and is showcased in the finished garment.



The guard hairs in this sample are clearly evident.



The guard hairs in this sample are clearly evident.

13. IMPURITIES/STAIN/TIP DAMAGE/SOUNDNESS (5 points)

This score is the same for both suri and huacaya.

In this section, the judge assesses the fleeces for non genetic characteristics that will decrease the commercial value of the fleece. Fleeces that have a lot of vegetable matter, contaminants, staining or weak tips will lose points. Tender fleeces will also lose points in this section, (as well as the "uniformity of length" section).

WHATS IN A SCORE?

Scores will vary greatly at fleece shows. At large shows, such as the National and Royals, the Supreme fleece will usually receive a fleece score in the low to high 80's – in smaller shows the highest scores maybe a lot less.

As with the halter class judging, it is at the judge's discretion as to whether or not they will award a 1st place in any class. Generally speaking a fleece must score over 60 points to be considered for a first place.

Some judges will ask the stewards to make comments on some scorecards, but this is not always the case.

MOST VALUABLE FLEECE (COMMERCIAL VALUE) CLASS

At some larger shows, eg National Show, the Most Valuable Fleece section is run.

This section is open to huacaya fleeces that are already entered in their age group at the show. In this section, points are awarded for attributes such as fineness, colour, length, style, vegetable matter content, tenderness etc to give a net price according to current pricing.

The net weight, (weight less contaminants) is then taken into account to give a commercial value for each fleece. A pre set table is used to calculate the scores. If you have a fleece that is scoring well in both the weight and attribute scores, then it could be worth considering entering it in a Most Valuable Fleece competition.



Most Valuable Fleece

SHOWING FLEECES IS A BIG JOB!

The amount of effort and input into running a fleece show is immense. Fleece shows require an incredible amount of work before, during and after the showing to make it successful. It is a huge effort between the convenor, stewards and judges to make it run well. After the judging is completed, the convenors/ stewards work is far from over. The scorecards then have to be printed, fleeces displayed etc. It is a huge job. However, many breeders say they really enjoy stewarding at fleece shows and learn a lot. Many judges, "think out loud" and stewards are on the spot to see many fleeces and understand more about what a judge is looking for. At a show of 100 fleeces, a judge will have to come up with 1,000 scores and then make further comparisons. This is why a great team of stewards is so beneficial.

So why not volunteer as a fleece steward at your next show?

RECENT CHANGES TO THE NEW ZEALAND FLEECE JUDGING SCORECARDS

Recently the New Zealand fleece scoring system has been changed. Previously the NZ score cards were very similar to the current AAA score cards. The NZ fleece scoring card is now divided into 2 sections. The top section awards scores for "Breeding Attributes" out of 100 points. These attributes are basically the same as on our AAA score cards, eg fineness, handle etc.

The bottom section is the "Management" section. In this section, the judge has the option to deduct points, (up to 15) for management issues such as contamination, poor skirting and tenderness.

Many AAA judges have now judged in New Zealand using this new scoring system.

CHANGES PLANNED FOR THE AAA FLEECE JUDGING SCORECARD

It has been many years since the AAA fleece scorecard has been reviewed. The AAA Showing and Judging Committee has nominated a working party to look into this matter. At present, this working party is gathering statistics from previous large shows where fleeces have been grid tested. They plan to analyse the statistics and apply this data to practical situations in order to revise the scorecards.

Some of the aims of this working party:

1. To use statistics from previous large shows to analyse the relationship between the fineness and weight scores.
2. To identify any anomalies in the scores cards.
3. To analyse the weightings of the various scores.
4. To look into the logistics of running some shows using "micron bands" as well as age groupings.



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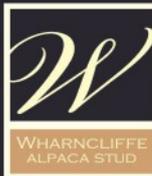


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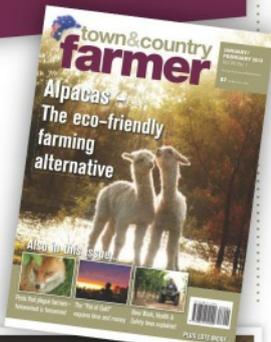
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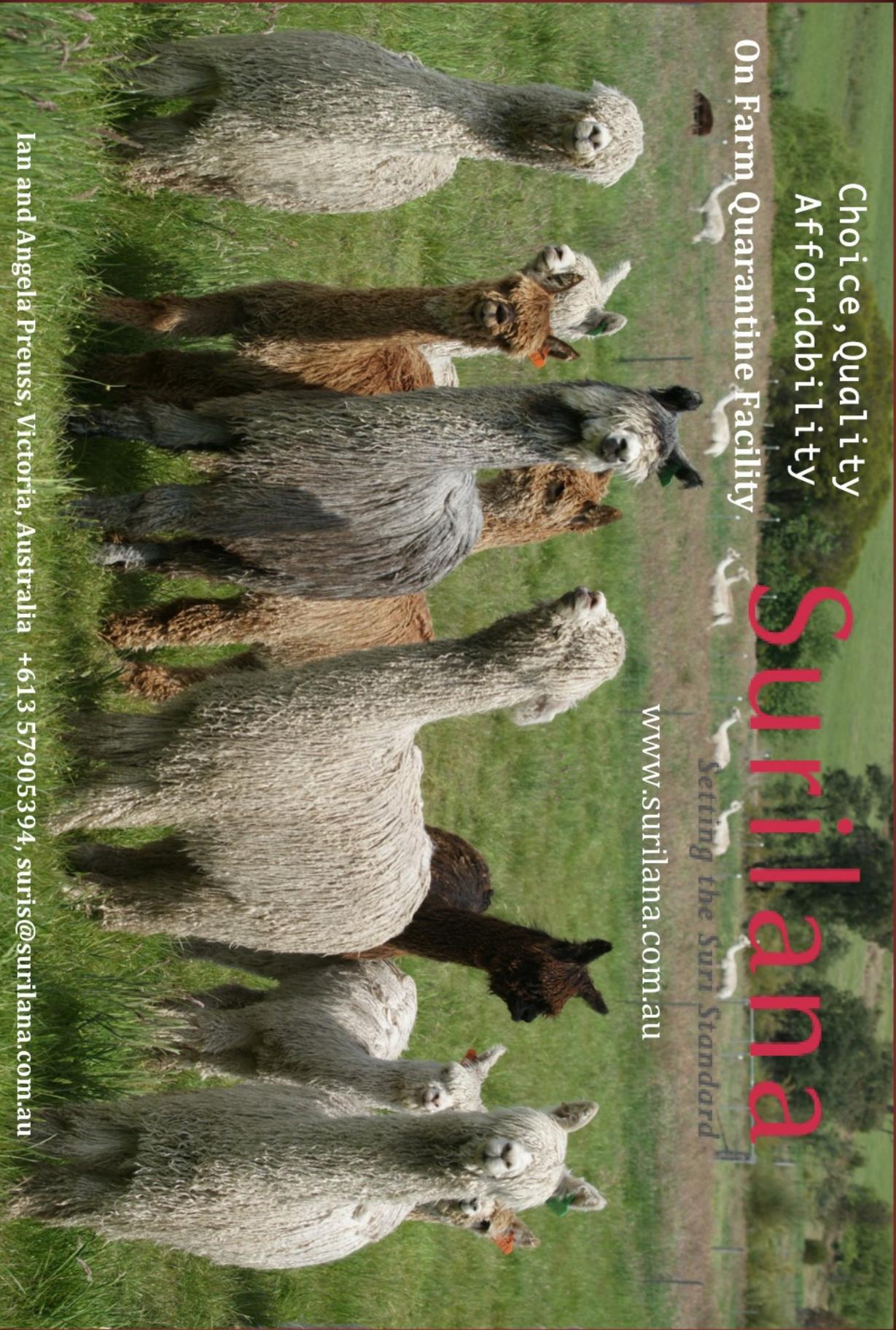
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