

ALPACA INDUSTRY FACT SHEET - 2021



Alpacas Are a Global Industry

- Native to South America, alpacas have been farmed for their fleece, leather, and meat for 7,000 years.
- Today, they are now being farmed in increasing numbers worldwide including Canada, UK, Europe, New Zealand, and South Africa.
- Countries throughout Asia with previously small alpaca numbers are now looking to grow their herd sizes.
- Australia imported its first alpacas from South America in 1988 and alpaca farming here is now a flourishing rural industry. Australia has some of the world's largest breeding studs, with a growing number of breeders in varied regions running commercially focused herds in excess of 2,000 alpacas.
- Peru has the world's largest alpaca population while Australia has one of the largest registered breeding herds in the world with more than 200,000 animals.
- Australian alpaca are currently exported to China, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Turkey with export protocols in the final stages of development for Chile. Market access into New Zealand, Europe and the United Kingdom.
- Australian alpaca breeding livestock is highly valued for its superior genetics, quality fleece and healthy constitutions. The export trade features three types of trade:
 - Premium breeding livestock with highly valued genetics which is sold to producers in the European Union (EU), United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand (NZ) markets;
 - Tier two breeding livestock sold in bulk consignments to establish alpaca herds in China; and
 - Tier two livestock sold in small consignments to the rest of Asia and the Middle East.
- The livestock export trade was valued at an average of AUD\$2.5 million per annum in 2018 (last official figures), with positive growth trends forecast to continue. (NB. This figure does not include the export value of alpaca fibre industry.)
- Fleece production will secure the long-term future of the Australian alpaca industry. Estimated fleece production in 2016 was 242 tons per annum and, as of February 2021, one cooperative is filling an AUD\$3 million international fibre order for 170 tons of fleece. The production of fleece and the export of breeding livestock are both essential for

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industry functioning, as export generates the capital required for growth through premium livestock sales and provides avenues for sale of Tier Two livestock; enabling a process of continuous improvement in fleece production across the national herd.

Australia's role in the growing global market

- Australia is a world leader in quality fleece production and our expertise is widely sought. Our position at the forefront of breed development and advanced fleece styles is the result of extensive genetic research and the development of sophisticated breeding technologies.
- Australian alpaca is valued for its soft, luxurious fleece sharing the top end of the international market with finest cashmere and superfine merino in the world of high quality natural fibres.
- Australia has been a key supplier of high-quality stud animals on the international market.
- Many of the champion alpacas in the UK, Europe and New Zealand are Australian bloodlines that were purchased by breeders to improve the quality of their herds. We hope to reopen market access into these key markets shortly with the assistance of the Australian government.
- Australia's national alpaca show is usually attended by international breeders and investors sourcing quality stud stock and learning about the ongoing advances in Australian breeding programs.

Meat production in the Australian alpaca industry

- Australia is one of the few countries outside of South America that has an emerging meat market, and is at the forefront of "new world" production.
- Australian alpaca meat is predominantly marketed through restaurants where chefs are working with the low fat, high protein meat best cooked either very quickly or as slow food.
- Currently alpaca meat is processed in both NSW and SA with selected breeders from around Australia supplying animals to meet growing demand in the food industry.
- Alpaca meat production has intrinsic value in the continuing development of alpaca as the next sustainable and fully viable commercial rural industry for Australia.

Women in the alpaca industry

- Many of Australia's alpaca breeders are women attracted to the industry by the manageability of the animals. In comparison to other livestock, alpaca are farmed easily with minimal external input.
- Where men and women work together women often do much of the animal husbandry, making the breeding decisions and showing animals.
- Many women are involved in the processing of alpaca fibre using machinery and also hand carding and spinning. The manufacture of products by knitting, weaving and felting is dominated by women.
- There are a number of significant herds being independently managed and developed by young women. These inspiring future industry leaders bring fresh skills, energy, and expertise to the industry at a time when it is moving further towards full commercialisation.



Technology in the Alpaca Industry

- Australia is a world leader in embryo transfer (ET), which has been a highly significant advance in producing some of the world's finest quality stud animals and fleece.
- The Australian alpaca industry has built on 200 years of gold standard merino knowledge enabling it to quickly forge an expert international reputation for quality Australian alpaca fibre. Beneficial science brought to the world alpaca industry from Australia's wool industry has included SRS® and AGE advanced breeding practices, and colour genetics.
- Australia's International Alpaca Register (IAR) is an online animal registry and incorporates a sophisticated breeding predictor. The quality and detail of this register further enhances the value of Australian alpacas on the world market.
- An Australian designed and manufactured fibre testing machine is a world leader used in more than 30 countries.
- Early Australian research has successfully demonstrated that immunoglobulin molecules in an alpaca's bloodstream have potential in the production of therapeutic antibodies such as snake anti-venoms. These findings are the result of research funded by the Australian Alpaca Association and the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), and could lead to a new, high value niche market for alpaca derived medical products. Australian researchers are studying 'nanobodies' - unique antibodies produced by alpacas - in a bid to understand whether they might be effective in blocking SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Youth in the Alpaca Industry

- The Australian Alpaca Association has established the Australian Alpaca Youth groups to create a structure and forum for young people under 25 who are interested in alpacas as a hobby or career.
- Leading breeders, judges and camelid veterinary experts are contributing to the youth development through a new mentoring program.
- A combination of show events, competitions, workshops, and youth camps giving our youth members opportunities to further develop their husbandry and handling skills and knowledge in judging fleece and animal conformation.

The future for Australian alpaca

- The development of improved fleece processing techniques will assist in meeting the demand for high quality Australian fleece from both Huacaya and Suri alpacas.
- Advances in Suri fibre production and processing will continue to impact. Suri is known for its lustre and ability to blend beautifully with silk to produce high quality woven materials.
- Australia's emerging meat and hide industry will offer greater opportunities to existing alpaca farmers and new entries into the industry and represents a move into fully commercial, whole animal farming.
- A continuing supply of wethered alpacas will serve the sheep industry as herd guards - fearlessly warding off foxes to protect newborn lambs.
- A growing worldwide consumer interest in alpaca products will generate demand for more producers of high fashion and high quality homewares, and an increase in industries such as the high quality manufacturing of alpaca carpets and rugs.
- New export markets for fibre and product are forecast to open into Asia.



Australian Alpaca
ASSOCIATION

About the Australian Alpaca Association

The Australian Alpaca Association (AAA) is the peak national body for the alpaca producing industry in Australia, representing over 1000 members. AAA is the only national organisation that can speak on behalf of the alpaca industry and represent the concerns and hopes of the alpaca community. AAA is led by a democratically elected representative Board made up of alpaca producers from around Australia. The AAA runs one of the most internationally advanced alpaca registers of bloodlines and breeding predictors to generate continual improvement in herd quality and worldwide reputation. AAA works with Animal Health Australia on issues of national animal health and welfare.

Further Information

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