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Alpacas Australia

The official publication of the Australian Alpaca Association Ltd.



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NLIS – why alpaca breeders need it and why we should pay for it – or – Why foot and mouth disease is like a volcano in Iceland

The National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS) and the pending application of the scheme by Government to alpacas and to llamas is a subject that has attracted much attention in recent years. It is a subject that will be familiar to all members for that reason.

Others, who are much more practical humans than I, have written about and debated the possibilities for the operational mechanics of the scheme in many places. I do not propose to embarrass myself by risking a mistake in commenting upon or attempting to explain those most practical and important aspects of the scheme and I will not do so.

Rather, I will attempt to make some explanation of a couple of the underlying principles that are in fact, common behaviours and ideas that are experienced by us all and are expressed throughout our society in different ways and that apply in this case.

As I see the position there are two very basic ideas at work in this instance.

The first idea is that the risk that the scheme is aimed at preventing or minimising, that is contagious disease in animals, is a very low probability risk, but is one that, if it comes to be, will have catastrophic consequences. As humans we all share a fundamental inability to come to terms with low probability risks that may have very adverse outcomes. That is the reason that we build large cities in well known earthquake prone regions and that we re-build those cities in precisely the same places after they have been destroyed by earthquakes e.g. San Francisco, Tokyo, Santiago. That is the reason that we may drive recklessly to gain a minute advantage – must get past that truck – even when we know that the risk of collision with oncoming traffic is tangible. That is the reason that some Australians have lived, sometimes without insurance, in high risk fire prone areas and have re-built in those locations even after suffering in a wild fire.

A most recent and stark example of our innate inability to understand, acknowledge and plan for low probability risks that may have dire consequences was presented by the eruption of a volcano, Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland. As readers will recall those responsible for the control of air traffic in Western Europe rapidly concluded that the risk of aircraft engine failure by reason of contamination with airborne particles of volcanic origin was real and substantial. A great many flights were delayed causing inconvenience to thousands of travellers. As I write, in May 2010, the volcano continues to erupt and further air travel disruptions in western Europe are expected. Media reports quickly contained criticism of the choice to cancel air traffic movements and of the consequent predicaments of a great many travellers.

Eventually there were reports of a near disaster that was fortunately avoided by a passenger flight in 1982 in the Indonesian archipelago that was also caused by an encounter of that aircraft with atmospheric material that had been ejected by a volcano. There was little mention of the fact that this particular volcano in Iceland had erupted for nearly an entire year in 1821 and that in 1783 another Icelandic volcano erupted, releasing gases that caused thousands of deaths in western Europe.

The recent and present risk arose because of our inability to connect the notions that the wind generally blows from the west, Iceland is west of Europe and of course that the last time there was a substantial eruption of this volcano, air travel did not exist.

Why have I laboured this point?

There are very good reasons to think that in 1872 at Werribee in Victoria there was an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in cattle and such was the level of public concern about the risk that there was a Royal Commission. There has been, in recent years, consideration of the circumstances then prevailing with a view to understanding why the disease did not spread further across the country and why it did not become endemic. Of course, two very different circumstances today are that there are many more susceptible animals in our community and secondly, there are many more people that have the ability to transport livestock across great distances than there were in 1872. Of course, we are ourselves, subject to volcanic interruptions, able to travel greater distances much more quickly than we were at that time.¹ All of those changes can only serve to enhance the risk to the Australian community and to AAA members.

I stress in this context that the NLIS is a tool for restraining the spread of disease. If it is possible to know where an animal has been, it will be possible to act, and in some way perhaps to anticipate the location of related outbreaks. I do not say that the NLIS will be a perfect remedy against the risk of contagious disease. I suggest that it is a means of managing the risk using the digital technology that is now available.

The second notion is that we commonly accept that it is often only fair that the user of a public service should bear some of the cost that is incurred in the provision of the public service. That is the reason that people who drive motor vehicles upon public roads are required to register their vehicles and thereby contribute to the capital cost of the road, to the road maintenance costs and to some extent to the cost of providing medical attention to persons who are injured in motor vehicle accidents.

What of the problem of 'freeloaders'? That is, people who do not pay but nonetheless benefit from the scheme that is created and funded by others. Some people find that prospect so repellent that they would rather have no scheme at all. That is the reason that it is a summary offence to drive an unregistered vehicle upon a public road. As against that, consider the many other instances where we tolerate 'freeloaders' because of the greater benefit that is had by the greater number e.g. because social security fraud occurs we do not abolish that system. We do not remove the use of roads and hospitals from people who cheat on their tax – we accept that as a small operational cost incurred for the greater benefit and look for other ways to encourage payment of the required tax.

The NLIS is not 'a great big new tax'. It is a powerful tool that will help members to prevent and contain a great danger.

I commend the NLIS to you.

Chris Bailey, AAA Ltd. Vice President

1 Interested readers may refer to the article "The 1872 outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Australia..." Bunn et al Aust Vet J 1998 vol. 76 pg.262

Mother's Day Surprise

Twin male cria were born on 9 May at Surilana. They were carried full term (one just over 3 kgs and the other 4 kgs). They need some TLC, but are doing well.



Don't you love alpacas and Collingwood cows

by Christine Milne, Australian Greens Senator for Tasmania

Alpacas and belted Galloways were high on my list of things to see and do at AGFEST last week. When my boys were little they used to point to belted Galloways in the paddocks and name them Collingwood cows and it has just stuck. Alpacas are a personal favourite and I still harbour ideas of having a pair one day. They have the loveliest faces and produce a wonderful fleece.

The rugs in the alpaca exhibit were so soft and comfy that they are really a must on every sofa. Just feeling one conjures up notions of lying on a couch on a cold winter's day, warm and comfy reading a book. I first saw alpaca rugs at the farmer's market in Wagga Wagga in NSW at the time I was fighting to stop the sale of the CSIRO wool scour in Geelong. Right around Australia on farms small amounts of fleeces from coloured sheep or alpacas are generated for high quality value adding but they need to be processed before being returned to farms for the knitting or weaving etc. The dismantling of the scour threatened those small producers and artisans who would have had to send the fleeces to South America or New Zealand to be processed if the scour had been lost. In the end the government sold the scour to a private carpet and rug company, Velieris Pty Ltd but I did secure an undertaking from the government that the sale conditions would include the company still taking small amounts of private scouring work.



Beautiful alpacas at AgFest



Talking rugs with the Alpaca Association

Have you moved?

Please notify the AAA Ltd. National Office of any address changes.

Excerpt from Senator Milne's blog on 12 May 2010: <http://sowingseedswithchristinemilne.wordpress.com/2010/05/12/don%E2%80%99t-you-love-alpacas-and-collingwood-cows/>

From the Senator's office by email on 13 May 2010: "We are following up on the scour as provided by Velieris and the word from the alpaca farmers is that the end result is superior to the CSIRO scour; a great result!"

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... So says a French proverb. However, I disagree. If you feed your alpacas appropriately (a good dinner), then they will not only produce beautiful fleece (genetics-dependent of course!), but also will provide you with a fine coat at shearing time! As alpaca breeders, you need to provide nutrients to your alpacas every day. This should primarily be in the form of pasture, hay and/or silage, and supplemented appropriately to provide extra nutrients at certain times of the year and depending on reproductive status. The aim of this article is to get you to think about what you are feeding out and why, to simplify your feeding regime and to save time, energy and costs associated with alpaca nutrition.



Growing alpacas and late-pregnant and lactating females will eat about 2-2.5% of their body weight as dry matter. Feed up to maintenance requirements with roughage (pasture, hay, silage). Then supplement with energy/protein as required (good quality pasture hay/lucerne hay/oats/lupins).

Pasture and water will supply most nutrients

Alpacas require four main ingredients in their diets: water, energy, protein and fibre.

When you feed your alpacas, bear in mind that the digestive tract in camelids has adapted to facilitate plant digestion by setting up a symbiotic relationship with billions of microbes in the forestomach. Therefore, when you feed an alpaca, you also feed the microbes in the forestomach. Look after the microbes and the microbes will look after your alpaca. Different rations favour different microbes so change feeds slowly to allow the microbes to adjust to the new nutrients.

How much to feed?

Alpacas will eat approximately 1.5% of their body weight as dry matter to maintain body weight (i.e. not growing, pregnant or lactating). **Feed all alpacas up to maintenance requirements with roughage** (pasture, hay, silage).

Ensure access to fresh clean water at all times.

The daily requirement of water is 50-80 mL/kg body weight per day (5-8% BW/day). So a 70 kg alpaca requires 3.5-5.6 litres of water per day. The amount of water drunk is lower when grazing green pasture (20% DM) compared with hay (90% DM). Alpacas will drink more water in hot weather and when lactating.

Pasture will supply most energy, protein and fibre needs. The proportion of each, depend on plant maturity. It will also satisfy most vitamin and mineral requirements.

Greener pastures contain more protein, therefore as pasture matures, protein decreases.

Crude protein content of feed required for:

- > maintenance 8-10% CP
- Higher levels are required for:
- > growth 12-15% CP
- > pregnancy 12% CP
- > lactation 13-15% CP

For example, 70 kg alpaca:

70 kg x 1.5% of body weight = 1.05 kg as dry matter (DM) i.e. all water removed from feed

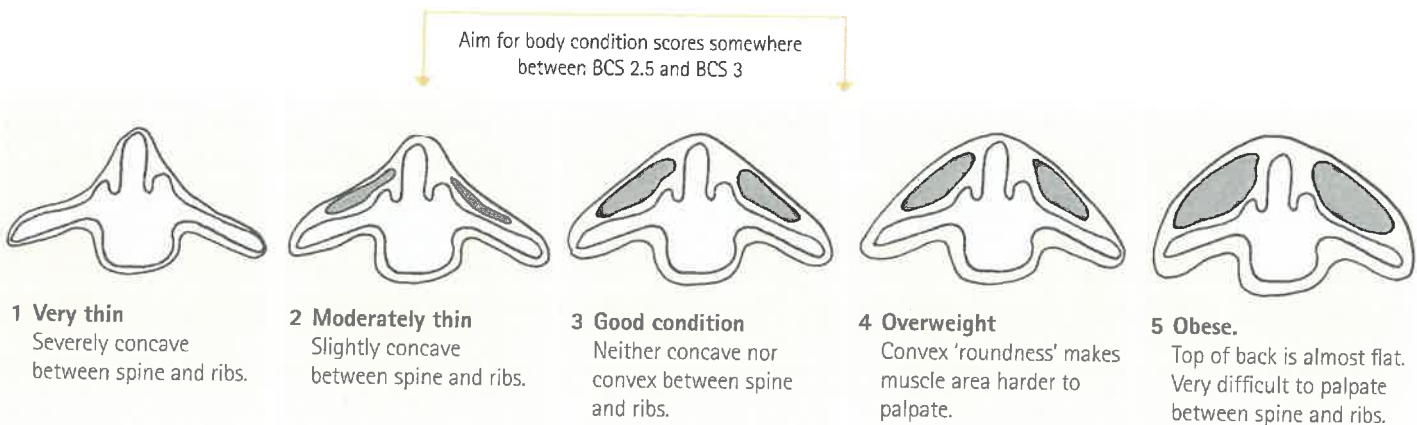
1.1 kg DM x 100/20 = 5.3 kg lush pasture/day (grass with 20% DM content)

1.1 kg DM x 100/90 = 1.2 kg pasture hay/day (hay with 90% DM content)

Body condition score to monitor if feeding too much or too little

Palpate musculature over the backbone at the level of the last ribs.

If alpacas are too fat, feed less and place any supplementary feed far away from the water trough so alpacas have to exercise a bit! If alpacas are too thin (e.g. during growth, pregnancy or lactation), feed more, better quality feed. If some alpacas in the same paddock are too fat and some are too thin, then divide the group and feed accordingly.



Ref: Alpaca Note 4: Body Condition Score of Alpacas. Prepared by AAA Inc. Education and Training Sub-committee.

Feed long-stemmed roughage

Alpacas need long-stemmed roughage (pasture, hay, silage greater than 4 cm in length) to keep their fore-stomachs functioning normally. A diet based on very short (or non-existent under drought conditions) pasture, chaff and grain/pellets or very lush spring pasture is not adequate to keep the stomach healthy. Ensure ad lib long-stemmed pasture/hay at all times if pasture fibre is limited.

A rough estimate of plant fibre content in pasture may be gained by manually testing the breaking strength of plant matter – more mature plants contain more fibre (thicker cell walls, more lignin) and are more difficult to break and less digestible.

Observe your alpacas to see if there is enough fibre in the diet:

- > More than 50% of recumbent alpacas should be chewing their cud
- > Body condition score – adequate fibre in the diet is required for fat deposition
- > Faecal consistency – % fibre vs % DM in diet

Vitamins

Many of the **water-soluble vitamins** (vitamins B, C) are provided by the microbes that live in the fore-stomachs, so alpacas do not require supplementation if they are healthy and are eating well.

Of the **fat-soluble vitamins**, vitamins A and E are available from green grass (even from green weeds that come up after brief summer rain) so only need supplementation if pasture is completely dry for more than 8-10 weeks.

Vitamin D supplementation is required in alpacas.

Inject all alpacas less than 2 years of age, and all females due to give birth in winter/early spring (to fortify colostrum) with 2000 iu vitamin D/kg body weight under the skin or into the muscle. Administer in early May, July (and September in southern climes like Tasmania). Read the label on the bottle to determine vitamin D concentration to determine what volume to administer. e.g. A 20 kg cria needs 40,000 iu vitamin D. If there is 75,000 iu per mL vitamin D in your selected source of vitamin D, then the cria would need approximately 0.5 mL of solution injected.

Minerals

Are minerals deficient in your area in neighbouring alpacas, sheep and cattle? Ask your local Department of Agriculture, local veterinarian and neighbouring farmers for information. If in doubt, you should sample soils, pasture and/or alpacas to determine if mineral levels are adequate, before supplementation. Acid, water-logged soils (average annual rainfall >500 mm) contribute to selenium deficiency.

Feeding supplements

Beware of feeding unnecessary supplements that may be costly, labour intensive to feed out and/or toxic to your animals. Do not feed out supplements designed for use in horses and pigs as they have different digestive systems and different mineral requirements (they are often too high in copper for alpacas). Save apple cider vinegar for your fish and chips. Leave Tahitian Noni juice in Tahiti.

Access for all

Animals should have access to long-stemmed fibre at all times (e.g. when pasture is limited consider placing a large round bale of pasture/oaten hay in the paddock). If supplementary feeding of concentrates (e.g. grain, pellets) is required, make **sure all animals can access the feed at the same time**. You can feed out directly onto the ground, but you may reduce wastage by feeding in long troughs (e.g. guttering, old conveyor belting laid out on ground, shade cloth attached to fence). Alpacas are not dogs: do not feed in individual plastic feed bowls.

Introduce new feeds over a period of 10-14 days to allow adaptation to the new feed.

Once adapted to the new feed, feeding twice as much, every second day will save you time and money, but more importantly will allow shy-feeders access to supplements. The dominant animals will fill up quickly (you have seen how they stake out the feed and spit at any animal trying to get near) and move away when full, allowing the shy feeders to eat the supplements later in the day/overnight.

Feed wastage

If supplements remain at the next feed out, or hay is being wasted, you are feeding too much (do their body condition scores reflect this?) Ensure that growing, pregnant and lactating animals are fed appropriately with good quality feed and feed the left-over portions to non-pregnant/non-lactating females, wethers etc.

Keep it simple

Complicated recipes containing scoops of this and cupsful of that do not alter cria sex or kill worms, but may waste your time, energy and money.

Feed alpacas up to maintenance requirements (go back to 'How much to feed?') **with pasture/hay/silage**. Supplements for growth, pregnancy and lactation may be met by providing energy with cereal grains (e.g. oats) and protein with lucerne hay and lupins.

Some simple rations to get you started

The following guidelines assume that there is no pasture available. You must combine skills of pasture evaluation with body condition scoring to determine appropriate supplementation. **These are rough guidelines only**. All new feed should be introduced slowly (over a period of 10-14 days) to allow the microbes to adjust to the new substrate.

Supplement all classes of stock up to maintenance requirements with *high fibre* supplements if pasture is limiting e.g. good pasture hay or 3 parts oatsen hay to 1 part lucerne hay. Ensure at least 25% of fibre is greater than 4 cm in length to optimise stomach function. Animals requiring more than maintenance requirements (growth, lactation) but unable to obtain them from pasture can be supplemented with concentrates e.g. maize/oats/lupins/vitamins/minerals.

A 70 kg adult alpaca can be **maintained** on 1.2 kg oatsen hay (88% DM, 8.7 MJ ME/kg DM, 7.6% crude protein) or good pasture hay.

Growing crias require 10.5-11 MJ ME/kg DM and 14-16% crude protein. An appropriate supplement could consist of 2 parts oatsen hay, 2 parts lucerne hay, 3 parts oats, 3 parts lupins. This will provide enough energy and protein and calcium and phosphorus in a ratio of 1.7:1.0. Beware of excess intake when grain feeding – introduce feed slowly, do not let grain feed build up in the bottom of feeders, mix well with fibre (hay/chaff) to reduce the risk of grain poisoning and death.

Lactating hembras require 10.5-11 MJ ME/kg DM and 13-15% crude protein. A mixture of 3 parts oatsen hay, 3 parts lucerne hay, 2 parts oats, 2 parts lupins would satisfy energy, protein and Ca:P needs. Again, beware of grain feeding.

The final word

Hopefully now you have a better idea of how to provide your alpacas with a 'good dinner'. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of maximising pasture intake and ensuring alpacas always have access to pasture/hay/silage. If pasture is limiting, do not feed out a few biscuits of hay every day, estimate how much each group is likely to consume in a week, and put hay out once per week. Remember to body condition score your animals whenever they are brought into the yards (shearing, vaccinations, mating etc.) to monitor condition gain/loss and alter rations accordingly. Use the time saved in fewer feedouts per week in processing the alpaca fine coat into fine coat for you! 🐾



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Alpaca Halter and Fleece Shows

An Overview of Trends

It is now over 20 years since the modern incarnation of alpacas have been a part of the Australian landscape. During that time, a vibrant show network has developed that is an important part of both the marketing of alpacas as well as an aid in breeding decisions for breeders.

As judges we are there to offer our opinion on the alpacas or fleeces in the show we are judging. In the halter ring, it is our job to compare the entrants to the current breed standards of the Association and then rank them on the qualities exhibited by each competitor.

In a fleece show, the system is different as each entrant is judged and awarded points against the points available for each attribute in the fleece score card. Points allocated for micron and the annualised fleece weights are determined by reference to the AAA micron and weight score cards for both suri and huacaya. Places are awarded based on the final points tally of each fleece in the class.

With that basic introduction to judging, what have been the improvements that we have seen over the years?

Improvements seen

Micron

It will be no surprise that in both the halter and fleece show arenas, there has been significant improvement in the general microns of the exhibits. With the dedicated breeding employed across all colours and both fleece types we have seen a general reduction in the microns. This has been reflected in the recent changes to our score cards for microns in the fleece shows. In the mid '90s, it was not unusual for herd micron averages to be in the high 20s for whites and light fawns and higher still for the darker colours.

With the introduction of new genetics, via shipments from Peru and the USA during the '90s and the naughties and the focus of breeders on improving their breeding programs, herds now often have average microns at or below 20 micron with alpacas being tested as low as 13 and 14 microns. There has also been significant improvement in the coloured herds with herd micron averages in the low to mid 20s.

Weights

The density of the alpacas shown is another area that has improved over the years. This has been reflected in the fleece weights in the fleece shows and resulted in the recent changes to the score card for fleece weights for both suri and huacaya.

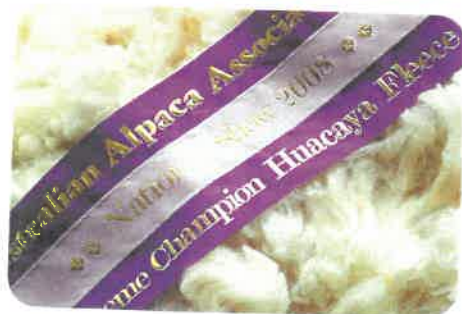
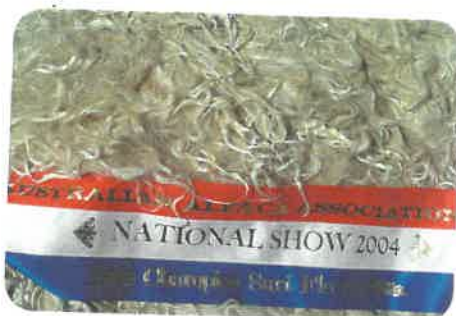
Fleece weights would routinely be under one kilogram per animal in the '90s. There were, of course, heavier fleece weights (most still below two kilograms) but these were usually associated with higher microns.

Today skirted fleece weights have generally improved and herd averages are often around the two kilogram mark with some peaking at approximately four kilograms.

This may not sound a huge improvement but when we factor in the associated improvement in microns this has been a substantial gain.

National Show Supreme Champion
Huacaya Fleeces 2004-2009

National Show Supreme Champion
Suri Fleeces 2004-2009



Trueness to Type

In our breed standards, we have a description of what an alpaca should look like. It is to this standard that alpacas are judged in the show ring. This standard describes what is generally accepted as correct in the various areas of conformation.

Over the years we have seen a general improvement in the overall trueness to type of the alpaca shown. In the early years, with the original imports, alpacas often exhibited the following:

- > longer in the muzzle
- > longer or incorrectly shaped ears
- > incorrect ear set
- > lack of substance of bone
- > lack of balance in the proportions
- > incorrect tail set

This was due to the fact that there was very little known about alpacas when they first arrived and there was also little choice in the alpacas that were originally imported. These original alpacas would now be seen as generally unimproved. With knowledge and experience and subsequent imports leading to improved breeding, these issues are now rarely seen in the show ring.

Coloured Alpacas

Initially there was a marked difference between the qualities exhibited in the whites and light fawns compared to the darker colours. This was generally due to the fact that the Peruvians had been told to focus on lighter colours so there had been very few breeders that had focused on breeding coloured animals. With the advent of exports of alpacas to the new markets in Australia, the USA and Europe it was realised that there was a demand for quality colours. This resulted in coloured farms being established and quality started to improve.

In the new markets, dedicated breeders established themselves with the aim of improving the quality of colours and this has resulted in a quantum improvement in the colours now being shown.

The improvement can be seen in both conformation and fleece traits. Of course there is still room for improvement but breeding programs are definitely showing results.



Areas for improvement

With the improvements there are still areas that need to be kept in mind.

Coloured fibres

With the improvement in the alpacas in the show ring and the fleeces in the fleece shows, an issue that we are seeing is coloured fibres through the blanket area. This may be both white fibres in darker fleeces or dark fibres in lighter colours.

It is essential that we focus to remove this out of our fleeces. If fibre is contaminated with another colour, it is likely to be penalised in a fleece show and it may result in a loss of a place or two in the halter ring.

In a commercial sense this can be a disaster. Manufacturers will not tolerate colour contamination and the fleece will be downgraded in price. If the colour contamination is not picked up it can result in the final buyer rejecting the product being manufactured which will not endear you to the fibre buyer.

This applies also to spots. In processing, it is often found that alpacas with a different coloured spot, will also have this other colour in the fleece as a contaminant to a greater or lesser degree.

It is a reality that this is an issue in most herds. The imperative is not to choose to ignore it. If we do, the problem will only become greater and more common. It is therefore essential to keep this in mind when making our breeding decisions.



Uniformity of Micron

Even though we have seen an improvement in microns at the mid-side, we still see a greater variation than is desired across the blanket area. This is the reason that fleeces in a show often score lower points for micron than the exhibitor feels is appropriate. The reason for this is that the micron assessment is taken from samples across the blanket either via a grid sample at some shows or across the samples taken from across the blanket area by the judge.

Again this is important as our aim is to maximise value in the fleeces we produce. If there is a lot of variation across a fleece upon classing at the processor level, it is almost certain to be downgraded to the classing line that most closely matches the overall micron. In Australia it is unlikely that the blanket will be divided into its component classing lines and thereby maximise dollar value for the producer due to time and cost constraints at the processor level.

Producing a uniform fleece with low variation between the primary and secondary fibres as well as low variation across the blanket area, will maximise value for the fibre producer and manufacturer. It will also result in a product with a superior handle for the end consumer.



Conformation

For many breeders, their single focus has been in the reduction of the micron of their alpacas. This is certainly a worthy aim but it needs to be achieved in a manner that does not ignore other important traits. One trait that is often overlooked is the conformation of the alpaca.

In the judging ring we have the alpaca walk out and parade before us so that we can monitor their gait and hence their leg conformation. We also view them standing and in profile to again assess their conformation. We assess the alpacas against the breed standard that indicates various known faults in all areas of conformation. The reason this is so important is that we are breeding with the view of producing alpacas with the fleece and conformation suitable for broadacre conditions. A sound conformation is essential if this is to occur.

When making breeding decisions, the breeder needs to remember that they cannot afford to trade off too much 'conformationally' to attain their fleece goals.

Some areas of concern in the show ring and that should be kept in mind are:

- > growth for age,
- > leg angulation, especially the rear legs
- > age of sexual maturity, especially testicular size
- > width through the chest and hips

Again the reason that these are emphasised is that it is essential that we maintain the alpaca fit for function. The function of the alpaca is not only to produce fine fibre but also to reproduce in a timely manner and live for a long and sustained period with little intervention by the breeder.

Skirting of fleeces

Skirting is an area that is often mentioned by judges and frustratingly seems to be ignored or misunderstood by exhibitors. It is important that fleeces are well skirted, as a poorly skirted fleece, though gaining points in the weight area, will lose points in the majority of other areas including:

- > fineness and handle (20 points)
- > uniformity of micron (10 points)
- > uniformity of length (10 points)
- > character and style (10 points)
- > lack of guard hair (10 points for huacaya and 5 points for suri)

With fleece weights being worth a total of 15 points and the other areas adding up to between 55 (suri) and 60 points (huacaya) there can be a large negative impact if fleeces are not skirted well.

I would encourage all breeders to review their score cards after a fleece show. Scoring a fleece is a time intensive process and the score card will give valuable feedback to all entrants in a class (unlike the show ring where only the placed animals are discussed). Looking at the scores for the individual sections will give a good insight into how the fleece exhibit compares to the

standard judged against. This will also give you an idea if there is room to improve through better skirting.

In summary, there is no doubt that the average animals and fleece shown have significantly improved across the board in the last decade. It is essential that the breeder does not become overly focused on a single trait (for example, micron) to the detriment of the other traits that make up the complete animal. Improvements in breeding takes time and focus however large improvements have been made and will continue to be made by the dedicated breeder.

I would encourage all breeders to be involved in showing as it is an important way of keeping in touch with the ongoing development of the breed as well as a great way to market both your own alpacas as well as the breed in general. It also provides a great opportunity to look at the animals and fleeces that are performing well to benchmark your own breeding program.

This article was prepared by Peter Kennedy of Canchones Alpacas, Victoria. He is a senior Australian judge as well as a certified AOBA (American) judge. Peter has judged extensively in Australia and the USA as well as Canada and New Zealand.

The genesis of this article arose from a request by the AAA Ltd. Magazine Reference Panel, seeking an article written by a AAA judge giving a judge's perspective on:

- > Improvements noticed in the breed/s and fleeces
- > Improvements still needed in both
- > Trends – both positive and negative – in the show ring or with fleece exhibits.

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Let's start at the very beginning (... *a very good place to start ...*)

As the alpaca industry starts to settle down into dollars and cents, everyone is beginning to acknowledge the truth that, unless your product is just more alpacas (selling your alpacas to other alpaca breeders), return on investment will eventually be measured in what you get paid for your fleece.

When we reach that point is a matter for debate, but even those breeders whose business plan involves nothing more than selling to other breeders will be striving to ensure that the animal they sell is well hung with valuable fleece. And preferably, lots of it.

What's valuable?

Well, they keep telling us all the qualities buyers are looking for, in fineness, style, evenness of micron, lack of guard hair, purity of colour, evenness of length, tensile strength, absence of contamination, lack of UV damage, softness of handle, etc. So what do they actually pay for?

Fineness.

Fineness is the **First Factor** of fleece. Just look at the purchase prices offered by the various players in the marketplace: they are all defined by fineness, and the prices soar for the lower end micron. Sure, there will be discounts and penalties for guard hair, lack of consistency in length, micron or colour, vegetable matter, contamination, short fibre, and so on. But if it's not down the fine end, it won't even get a look at the high end prices which justify a second look for those other features.

Now consider density.

Density is the **Faux Factor**. What, I hear you cry in outrage? Surely, density is a *fundamental factor*, not a *false factor*. Well, think about it. We breeders like density, because it means more fibres on an animal per unit skin area, and that means more fleece weight and more income. No argument. But do buyers pay more for density? No. Density never enters their mind. In fact, how can you assess density of a fleece once it's off the alpaca? Surely it depends on whether it came off a small frame (higher density) or big frame (lower density). But buyers don't care whether it came off a mammoth or a maggot, so long as it has the qualities they are looking for. That's why density is the **Faux Factor**. It's just another way of saying high fleece weight, but at the same time ignoring the other things that might contribute to higher fleece weight. Like increased micron (ugh!). Or increased length (hmm!)



Of course, breeders will always look for density, and pay more for breeding stock which exhibit it, because they want their animals to produce *more* of whatever fleece they are already producing. Higher fleece weights mean, quite simply, more money. Of course, that begs the question: how do we determine density? Skin biopsy will allow us to measure true density according to its definition, by counting the follicles per unit area.

But what about in the show ring? Comparing two alpacas of identical micron presents no great challenge: even the proverbial 'fistful of fibre' will differentiate the dense from the less dense. But what if one is 17 micron, and the other 24 micron? Simple arithmetic tells us that, if the animals are of the same density and the same length and the same size, the latter (24µ) will have a fleece weight twice that of the former (17µ). Can the 'fistful of fleece' detect the superiority of the former if it is slightly more than half the bulk of the latter, or the superior density of the coarser fleece if it is slightly greater than twice the bulk of the finer fleece? Not even in your wildest dreams, allowing even the improbable circumstance that all other factors between the two fleeces are identical.

So how do we judge density in the showing? By the amount of skin showing between the fibres? Given that follicles actually account for only about 5% of total skin area, even a 20% increase in density (again, presuming that fibre diameter remains unchanged) would bring this figure to only 6%. Is that discernible to the eye? Not even in another dream. And if the fibre diameter changes, that figure would vary even *without* a change in density. That leaves us with the default option of rolling a staple between two fingers, and looking thoughtful while you think of what to say ...

So, without dismissing density as unimportant, I have called it the *Faux Factor* simply to indicate how easily one may be misled by false information, derived from false premises.

What needs to be done, without presuming the outcome, is to have trained and experienced judges assess density in a series of alpacas of varying size and micron, and have those assessments tested against skin biopsies taken on the same animals at the same time.

Until the subjective assessment of density can be validated in this way, it is safer to rely on fleece weights.

Phew! I had not intended that to be so long.

Length does matter.

Let's get onto the next factor. The *Forgotten Factor*. That factor is length. I have written elsewhere on this subject, but suffice to say *Length Matters*. Doubling length doubles fleece weight. In this way, it is no less important than density, but infinitely more simple to measure. The difficulty is that 'length', as we regard it, cannot be meaningfully interpreted without one other parameter, one not instantly apparent from a simple examination of the animal. That parameter is the date of last shearing. Without it, length means nothing, because it is actually the *rate of growth*, and not the length, which is important. A centimetre a month is a good benchmark for a productive fleece. Because that information is not always available or instantly apparent, I have dubbed it the *Forgotten Factor*, because it is so easily overlooked, both in competition and in sales. But make no mistake, it is no less fundamental for being forgotten.

Factor Four is what I am calling the *Flirt Factor*. Style. Attractive, sensual, seductive, full of promise. But not always delivering. Style is usually looked upon as an indirect measurement of fibre organisation, and interpreted in different ways by different people. There are many who suggest that factors such as fibre fineness, evenness, density, even length, can be predicted just by looking at the style of fleece. And to whatever extent that they may be correct in drawing those conclusions, style may be a useful predictor of the value of a fleece, since all the traits linked to style are determinants of value. But processors seem, on the whole, less interested in style for its own sake. Some argue that crimp has a role in processing, but there are few processors who are prepared to pay extra for a particular crimp style. In my visit to Grupo Inca in 2008 I was shown an experiment in processing where five different fleece styles were processed identically through to tops, and then to woven fabric. The conclusion by the experts in textile production was that the final product was only marginally influenced by the very different fleece styles.

The final factor is what I have called the *Feel Factor*. This is very simply the tactile experience which one has when one plunges one's hands into a full fleece, what has been described in the past as the 'Wow factor'. As my partner, Harriet, was wont to say, "Let your fingers do the talking". A premium fleece will always be soft, slippery, sensuous, cool and creamy to the touch, not dry, scratchy, harsh or rough. The *Feel Factor* is a combination of many different features of fleece, including fineness, evenness, style, and lustre, with lack of guard hair, vegetable contamination and dust. It is easily appreciated, but almost impossible to measure. One can easily imagine the fleece *ingénue* proclaiming defensively, "I don't know much about fleece, but I know what I like!" And he will be right, so expert is the average human hand in judging softness and handle.

In summary, the fleece buyer is not interested in your show ribbons, cares nothing for your pedigree, and is dismissive of your alpaca's density. He cares not a toss for your fleece weight, and is unimpressed by your rate of fleece growth. He is unmoved by the age of the animal from which the fleece was taken, and completely unshaken by the fact that the animal in question has one testicle or a wry face. On the other hand, the buyer of your breed stock wants to know all those things.


The wool buyer is interested in the fineness and quality of your fleece, and how much of it you have for sale. It is you, the breeder, whose responsibility it is to see that it is grown with optimal efficiency and at lowest cost, on healthy, fertile, long-lived alpacas, producing high volumes of valuable fleece for as long as possible.

What could be simpler?

MICRON	FLEECE WEIGHT (kgs)	AAFL		Alpaca Ultimate		Cashmere Connections		Ultrafine	
		\$/kg	Value after classing	\$/kg	Value after classing	\$/kg	Value after classing	\$/kg	Value after classing
10	0.375	\$50.00	\$17.81	\$66.00	\$21.75				
11	0.454	\$50.00	\$21.55	\$66.00	\$26.95			\$70.00	\$28.76
12	0.540	\$50.00	\$25.65	\$66.00	\$32.64			\$70.00	\$34.80
13	0.634	\$50.00	\$30.10	\$66.00	\$38.83			\$70.00	\$41.36
14	0.735	\$50.00	\$34.91	\$66.00	\$45.51			\$70.00	\$48.45
15	0.844	\$50.00	\$40.08	\$66.00	\$52.69			\$70.00	\$56.06
16	0.960	\$50.00	\$45.60	\$44.00	\$39.24			\$44.00	\$39.24
17	1.084	\$50.00	\$51.48	\$44.00	\$44.69			\$44.00	\$44.69
18	1.215	\$11.60	\$11.06	\$30.00	\$33.45			\$36.00	\$40.74
19	1.354	\$11.60	\$12.32	\$30.00	\$37.61				
20	1.500	\$11.60	\$13.65	\$18.00	\$24.00	\$6.60	\$9.90		
21	1.654	\$6.80	\$7.11	\$18.00	\$26.77	\$6.60	\$10.91		
22	1.815	\$6.80	\$7.80	\$13.00	\$20.60	\$6.60	\$11.98		
23	1.984	\$6.80	\$8.53	\$13.00	\$22.79	\$4.40	\$8.73		
24	2.160	\$4.70	\$4.75	\$10.00	\$18.60	\$4.40	\$9.50		
25	2.344	\$4.70	\$5.16	\$10.00	\$20.44	\$4.40	\$10.31		
26	2.535	\$4.70	\$5.58	\$8.00	\$17.28	\$3.30	\$8.37		
27	2.734	\$4.70	\$6.01	\$8.00	\$18.87	\$3.30	\$9.02		
28	2.940	\$3.25	\$2.21			\$3.30	\$9.70		
29	3.154	\$3.25	\$2.37			\$3.30	\$10.41		
30	3.375	\$3.25	\$2.53			\$1.10	\$3.71		
31	3.604	\$3.25	\$2.70			\$1.10	\$3.96		
32	3.840	\$3.25	\$2.88			\$1.10	\$4.22		
33	4.084	\$3.25	\$3.06			\$1.10	\$4.49		

Note: This chart makes certain assumptions and generalizations, and does not account for special terms of payment, delivery, and specifications:

- > The chart above is based on a comparison of the prices paid for a hypothetical white huacaya saddle of 20 micron weighing 1.5 kgs.
- > No account is taken of the non-saddle portion of the fleece.
- > If nothing but the micron were changed, up or down, the prices quoted are what would be realised for the same saddle were its micron (alone!) altered, but density, length, etc. all remained unchanged.
- > Prices quoted are specifically for white huacaya fleece. Coloured and suri fleeces may command different prices and terms.
- > Prices are for fleece classed to the requirements of the purchaser AND complying with the specified micron range. Fleeces may be downgraded from their assessed micron for a range of reasons.
- > Neither payment terms nor transport costs are considered in making this comparison.
- > Fleece testing, at \$3 per fleece, is subtracted from the total value of fleeces submitted to both Alpaca Ultimate and the Ultrafine Scheme, and an allowance made per/kg for the cost of classing by AAFL.
- > Best prices for whole fleeces in this hypothetical example are highlighted in red. 🏆



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Bruce A. McGregor
Fibre and Animal Scientist
Deakin University
Geelong, VIC

Some consumers are willing to pay a premium for 'organic' products. While all animal fibres can claim to be natural, biodegradable and sustainable only those whose production system has been accredited as being organic can claim to be 'organic fibre'.

Organic textile market

The world textile market for mohair, alpaca and cashmere is valued at over \$1 billion. The world organic textile market is valued at over \$5 billion and growing at 20% annually. There are a variety of certified organic textile products available world-wide that use a range of differing standards.

For Australian Merino wool, regulators and markets are placing pressure on producers to improve the ethical aspects (e.g. traceability, sustainability, safety, animal welfare) of their enterprises, and these pressures will increase with time for all animal fibres. Australian producers have exported organic wool but the premiums are low, only large scale producers are viable and the global financial crisis has undermined marketing efforts.



A display of colourful WOOLganic knitting yarns at the Tasmanian Wool Centre, Ross.
(Photo B.A. McGregor).

Organic animal fibre

The critical issue with organic production systems is the extent to which producers can make substantiated and true claims about the attributes of their products. An external auditor verifies that the claims made for a product are true. To obtain organic certification for their products a farmer must meet strict certification standards and undertake work over a number of years. Maintaining these standards is therefore critical to the credibility of organic accreditation.

The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) recently published a report discussing how farmers and supply chain partners can participate in the rapidly growing organic fibre market. The report summarises how Australian farmers can gain accreditation for organic fibre production. A number of case studies are provided relating to organic marketing of Australian wool, cotton and other products. The report briefly summarises some of the recent developments in European regulations for organic textile accreditation.

If you intend to export food, cosmetics, fibre or any product that is described (labeled) as 'organic', 'bio-dynamic', 'biological', 'ecological' or by any other word of similar indication, you need to be aware of the government regulations relevant to this issue. There are seven organisations in Australia that can provide organic certification.

The following implications follow from the existing framework:

- > A national system is in place.
- > Producers of alpaca can commence conversion to organic production as soon as they make the decision.
- > Costs of complying with the audit requirements are relatively high and so only larger alpaca businesses will find organic certification potentially attractive.
- > Given the high costs for complying, financial returns from sales of organic fibre will need to be sustainably higher for the business case to be attractive.

Australian experience

Feedback to the author indicates that many local alpaca producers are not satisfied with current certifying requirements in Australia and seek more producer friendly and environmentally relevant standards. A similar development occurred for Australian cotton. There is demand for organic alpaca, but supply is very limited or non-existent, and some trial marketing has occurred.

Implications for industry

The following issues need to be considered by the alpaca industry and supply chain partners if they are to develop organically certified products:

- > Development and adoption of a simplified and low-cost 'organic' or 'eco-friendly' certification system.
- > Investigation of critical production issues including: animal health, especially internal parasitism; animal welfare; castration; critical mass of fibre; record keeping.
- > Alignment of research and development priorities within the RIRDC and other support agencies.
- > Increasing the flow of information to producers.
- > Working with larger alpaca producers to develop successful case studies.
- > Clear identification of market opportunities and supply chains for organic alpaca.
- > Development of direct marketing pathways to enable higher income to overcome the high costs for compliance. 📌

Further information is contained in:

McGregor, B.A. (2010). *Pathways for the Development of Organic Rare Natural Animal Fibre Production*. Research Report 09/163. (Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation: Barton, ACT).
<https://rirdc.infoservices.com.au/items/09-163>

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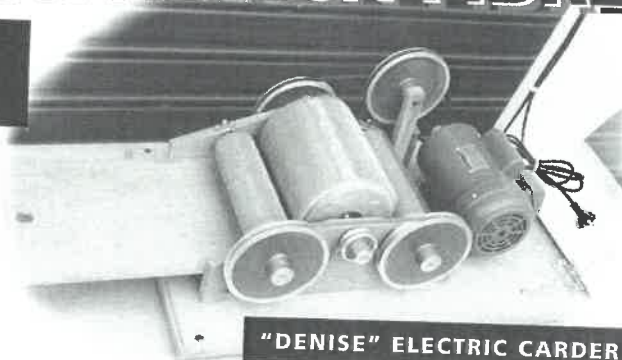
A traditionally designed rug using wool organically dyed with cochineal, Oaxaca region, Mexico. (Photo B.A. McGregor)

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AAA Ltd. Showing and
Judging Reference Panel

The quality of Australian alpaca fleece has improved markedly in recent years and in July 2009 the AAA Ltd. fleece scoring system for shows was updated accordingly.

Major changes

- > all elements of judging criteria have maximum possible points in multiples of 5.
- > the fleece weight is now scored out of 15 points (previously 20).
- > priority is given to fineness (15 points – plus 5 points for handle) and fleece weight 15 points.
- > next ranked priorities are:
 - uniformity of micron, length
 - character and style
 - brightness
 - lack of guard hair

These are each scored out of 10 points for huacaya.

Suri fleeces have 15 points allocated for lustre and 5 points for lack of guard hair.

- > further qualities to be assessed are:
 - uniformity of colour
 - density of staple / lock and
 - impurities / stain / tip damage and are each scored out of 5 points.

Since these changes have been implemented feedback has been positive.

2010 Fleece Weight and Micron Calculators

The fleece weight and micron calculators have been adjusted for 2010 using recent data from over 600 fleeces from shows that grid micron tested. Exhibitors will note that these adjustments will often result in lower fleece weight and micron scores than previous score charts. This is across the board for all fleeces with the best fleeces scoring in the low 80s. Exhibitors need to keep in mind that the weight allocation is scored out of 15 points now instead of the previous 20. Improvements in our fibre quality will be reflected in higher scores coming through. Data will continue to be collected to ensure we keep in line with these improvements.

The fleece weight calculator is used on annualised fleece weights only. Fleece stewards arrive at an annualised fleece weight by the following steps:

1. Weigh fleece. (Note: If it is 12 months fleece growth that is the Annualised Fleece Weight go straight to Step 3).
2. Divide this weight by the months of growth. Multiply this figure by 12 = Annualised Fleece Weight.
3. Use Annualised Fleece Weight to calculate points on Weight Calculator Chart for correct age group.

ALPACA FLEECE JUDGING – HUACAYA

	Max	Points
Fineness (15) and Handle (5)	20	
Uniformity of Micron	10	
Length	10	
Colour	5	
Character and Style (Crimp)	10	
Density of Staple	5	
Brightness	10	
Lack of Guard Hair	10	
Impurities / Stain / Tip Damage	5	
Clean Fleece Weight Score	15	
Total	100	

ALPACA FLEECE JUDGING – SURI

	Max	Points
Fineness (15) and Handle (5)	20	
Uniformity of Micron	10	
Length	10	
Colour	5	
Character and Style (Lock Style)	10	
Density of Lock	5	
Lustre	15	
Lack of Guard Hair	5	
Impurities / Stain / Tip Damage	5	
Clean Fleece Weight Score	15	
Total	100	

2010 HUACAYA FLEECE WEIGHT CALCULATOR

Points Huacaya	6-12 months	>12-18 months	>18-30 months	>30-48 months	>48-60 months	>60 months
Annualised fleece weight	kgs	kgs	kgs	kgs	kgs	kgs
15	2.6	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.5
14	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.4	2.3
13	2.2	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.1
12	2.0	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.0	1.9
11	1.8	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.7
10	1.7	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.6
9	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.5
8	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.4
7	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.3
6	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.2
5	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.1
4	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.0
3	1.0	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.0	0.9
2	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.8
1	</=0.8	</=0.7	</=0.8	</=0.9	</=0.8	</=0.7

2010 HUACAYA MICRON CALCULATOR

Points Huacaya	6-12 months	>12-18 months	>18-30 months	>30-48 months	>48-60 months	>60 months
15	15.0	16.0	17.0	18.0	19.0	20.0
14	16.0	17.0	18.0	19.0	20.0	21.0
13	17.0	18.0	19.0	20.0	21.0	22.0
12	18.0	19.0	20.0	21.0	22.0	23.0
11	19.0	20.0	21.0	22.0	23.0	24.0
10	20.0	21.0	22.0	23.0	24.0	25.0
9	21.0	22.0	23.0	24.0	25.0	26.0
8	22.0	23.0	24.0	25.0	26.0	27.0
7	23.0	24.0	25.0	26.0	27.0	28.0
6	24.0	25.0	26.0	27.0	28.0	29.0
5	25.0	26.0	27.0	28.0	29.0	30.0
4	26.0	27.0	28.0	29.0	30.0	31.0
3	27.0	28.0	29.0	30.0	31.0	32.0
2	28.0	29.0	30.0	31.0	32.0	33.0
1	29>	30>	31>	32>	33>	34>

2010 SURI FLEECE WEIGHT CALCULATOR

Points Suri	6-18 months	>18-30 months	>30 months
Annualised fleece weight	kgs	kgs	kgs
15	2.6	2.7	2.8
14	2.4	2.5	2.6
13	2.2	2.3	2.4
12	2.0	2.1	2.2
11	1.8	1.9	2.0
10	1.7	1.8	1.9
9	1.6	1.7	1.8
8	1.5	1.6	1.7
7	1.4	1.5	1.6
6	1.3	1.4	1.5
5	1.2	1.3	1.4
4	1.1	1.2	1.3
3	1.0	1.1	1.2
2	0.9	1.0	1.1
1	</=0.8	</=0.9	</=1.0

2010 SURI MICRON CALCULATOR

Points Suri	6-18 months	>18-30 months	>30 months
15	16.0	18.0	20.0
14	17.0	19.0	21.0
13	18.0	20.0	22.0
12	19.0	21.0	23.0
11	20.0	22.0	24.0
10	21.0	23.0	25.0
9	22.0	24.0	26.0
8	23.0	25.0	27.0
7	24.0	26.0	28.0
6	25.0	27.0	29.0
5	26.0	28.0	30.0
4	27.0	29.0	31.0
3	28.0	30.0	32.0
2	29.0	31.0	33.0
1	30>	32>	34>



Micron Testing Show Fleeces

Micron readings obtained from fleece testing can vary somewhat due to where and what type of sample is taken. A mid-side sample taken from a fleece at the time of shearing does not always reflect the uniformity of that micron across the whole of the saddle presented for judging.

Due to both cost and time involved, fleece testing is not undertaken at most Australian shows where accredited AAA judges adjudicate.

It should be clearly understood by members entering fleeces for shows that the judge's assessment at the time of judging is final and, where considered appropriate, overrules any other information obtained prior to the show.

The AAA Ltd. Showing and Judging Reference Panel would like to move towards as many shows as possible having the fleece entries micron tested by grid sample. Unfortunately it creates a heavy workload for stewards and may be unrealistic given the time constraints of many shows. Perhaps the standard could be set for all major Royals. The AAA Ltd. National Show, Sydney Royal and Canberra Royal Shows already lead the way in this area.

Skirt your fleeces!

Adequate preparation of fleeces by exhibitors is vital to ensure their fleeces can score the maximum points available to them. It appears a large number of exhibitors are attempting to gain more fleece weight points by not skirting adequately.

Leaving in straight, short, hairy pieces of fleece may gain a couple of fleece weight points but can result in losses of 10 points or more across the score card.

Uniformity of micron, character and style, length and lack of guard hair points can be heavily penalised if the fleece has not been skirted adequately.

First time exhibitors are encouraged to enlist the help of an experienced exhibitor to advise them on preparation of fleeces for a show.

Information related to fleece judging is available on the AAA web site (www.alpaca.asn.au) 🐫

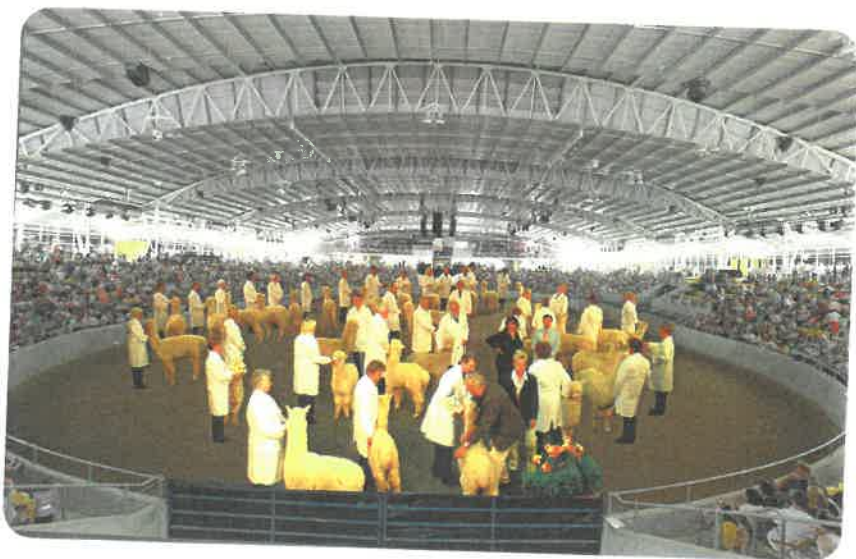
Alastair Smedley
2010 National Show and Sale
Reference Panel

14 to 17 October, Tamworth, NSW



Set high on the New England Plateau, Tamworth is the largest town in the area. With its breathtaking views, fine restaurants and fascinating history it has something to offer every visitor.

Many people know of the annual Country Music festival, but Tamworth now has a new attraction, the Australian Equine and Livestock Events Centre (AELEC). This is a \$30 million state of the art venue that has already hosted a number of high profile events. The Stock Horse, Cutting Horse, Quarter Horse and Show Jumping Associations have all used the Centre for shows or championships.



The impressive entrance to the Centre leads straight onto the bright mezzanine floor. From here every vantage point gives a view of the 80 metre main arena, surrounded by over three thousand tiered seats. At the far end of the building, beyond the bar and cafe is the sales ring used by some of the biggest names in the thoroughbred industry.

This is where the 17th National Show and Sale will be held between 14 and 17 October 2010.

Up to seven hundred of Australia's finest alpacas will be on show. The well lit mezzanine floor will host the trade stands and provide easy access to the art, craft and photography displays.

The impressive, well designed stables are light and airy and will house the alpacas in quiet comfort.

The alpacas will be assessed by **Lyn Dickson** and **Jude Anderson**. Lyn is from Warralinga Alpacas in the Hawkesbury and has been involved in alpaca breeding since 1992. Jude is based in the USA where she runs Pucara Alpacas and has a long association with Australian alpacas and the AAA. Both Lyn and Jude have extensive international experience and with over 30 years of judging between them bring a wealth of knowledge to the show ring.

Bill Robbins, a foundation Australian alpaca judge will be in charge of the fleeces. Traron Alpacas is near Holbrook in NSW and is where Bill runs a herd of about 400 suri and huacaya.

Local artist and wine maker **Stephen Dobson** will be judging the art and photography, while the popular craft section will be expertly evaluated by **Darrel Loughton** of Beavona Lodge Suri Alpacas situated near Gin Gin in Queensland.

The National Show and Sale is a celebration of all things alpaca that includes a great entertainment program. On Friday evening, the Cocktail Party at AELEC and the Alpaca Ball at the West Leagues Club on Saturday is not to be missed. There will be excellent food, great company and dancing to local band, Splashpool.

On Sunday all the attention moves to the sales ring where carefully selected alpacas will be auctioned. This is a tense and exciting time with bidding from buyers in the ringside seats and from around the world.

So come to Tamworth for a few days, enjoy the country hospitality and experience the best the alpaca industry has to offer in one of the finest venues in the country. 🍷

Julie McClen
Oakgrove Alpacas, NSW

– who wants it and what do they want?

In recent years we have seen the emergence of several new buyers of alpaca fibre, as well as the established buyers and processors willing to buy your fleece.

But what micron, length or colour do they buy; do they want Suri, Huacaya or both; and what are they making from your fibre and where is this happening?

This information can at times be difficult to interpret or locate without contacting each individual buyer, so this article is intended to clarify who is buying what types of fleece and also serves as a reminder that there are many options to sell your fleece. The list published in this article clarifies the finer points and may help direct growers to a buyer suitable for what they produce.

The list is also published on the AAA web site (www.alpaca.asn.au) in lesser detail, along with a list of businesses that can process your fleece for you if you prefer to value add.

The list is not inclusive of every small buyer who may have arrangements with local breeders to purchase their fleece, but indicates the main known buyers of larger quantities at this time.

It is also of interest to know what some of the larger commercial producers who don't directly buy fleece from the grower want to buy, and this helps us as growers of alpaca fibre to tailor our herds towards viable markets.

A short list of some of the established larger processors' requirements is included below the buyers list.

Buyers listed in alphabetical order – please contact any of the listed buyers directly for current pricing and detailed criteria.

Buyer	Type	End product	Micron Range	Length	Colour	Contact	Comments
Alpaca Ultimate, NSW	Huacaya	Yarn, fabric. Processed in New Zealand.	28 micron and under	80-120mm	White	www.alpacaultimate.com.au	Current prices available from the web site.
Alpaca Ultrafine Bale Scheme, NSW	Huacaya	Premium apparel. Processed in Peru by the Michell Group, Peru.	19 micron and under	White 70-110mm Coloured 80-120mm	All colours	www.aaft.com.au	Current prices available from the web site. A joint venture between Australian Alpaca Fibre Testing and House of Alpaca.
Alpha Centauri Alpacas, NSW	Huacaya	Yarn, premium clothing range, homewares (quilts, throws, blankets etc.).	Under 25 micron	80-120mm	Dark fawn to brown, grey and black	www.acalpacas.com	Skirted saddles only.
Australian Alpaca Fleece Limited, Victoria	Suri and Huacaya	Apparel, homewares. Processed in New Zealand and Peru.	All microns	All lengths	All colours	www.aafli.com.au	Current prices available from the web site.
Becreatif, Victoria	Suri and Huacaya	Apparel, yarns. Hand made in Australia.	Up to 28 microns	70mm minimum to any length	All colours	www.becreatif.com.au Email: sales@becreatif.com.au	All quantities are looked at. Clean and low vm (vegetable matter) preferred. Contact via email for current pricing.

Buyer	Type	End product	Micron Range	Length	Colour	Contact	Comments
Cashmere Connections, Victoria	Suri and Huacaya	Tops and dehaired fibre for woollen and worsted spinning. Processed in Australia.	All microns	All lengths	All colours	Email: cashmere@westconnect.com.au	Buying from growers as well as supplying to Creswick Woollen Mills, Australian Country Spinners, Bendigo Woollen Mills, Kelly & Windsor. Also, hoping to export fine lines in the near future.
Creswick Woollen Mills, Victoria	Huacaya	Throw rugs, blankets, socks. Processed in Australia.	24 micron and under	50-100mm	All colours	www.creswickwool.com.au	Buying directly from the grower. Contact via web site for current pricing.
House of Alpaca, NSW	Suri and Huacaya	Product range TBA	All microns	All lengths	All colours	Email: thehouseofalpaca@bigpond.com	Contact via email for a current price list.
Kelly and Windsor, Victoria	Huacaya	Quilts, underblankets.	27 micron plus	50-120mm	White and Light fawn	www.kellyandwindsor.com	Contact via web site for current price list.
Natural Coloured Fibre Company, Victoria	Huacaya	Stockpiling to create mill runs for fashion garments through to carpets.	All microns	All lengths	All colours	Email: natcolfibre@vic.australis.com.au	All fleece accepted at Ballarat depot only. Saddle to be separated from other fleece.
Tailored Strands, Victoria	Huacaya	Wholesale yarn and apparel.	22-26 micron preferred	80-120mm	White, black, grey and dark fawn	www.tailoredstrands.com.au	Buying direct from growers, contact for current pricing.

Here is a short list of what some of the larger established processors have advised they look for in the fleece they buy.

Processor	Product	Micron Range	Colour	Crimp	Length	Lustre	Comments
Creswick Woollen Mills, Victoria	Woollen spinning producing throw rugs, blankets, socks.	Prefers 18-21 micron and a maximum of 24 micron	All colours	Not a major factor in their process; have seen no difference in the processing of defined to soft crimp types.	50-100mm 100mm preferred	Not important	Needs a minimum of 120kg per micron line.
Kelly and Windsor, Victoria	Quilts, underlays.	27 micron or higher	White, light fawn	Prefers higher crimp frequency/amplitude.	50-120mm	Not important	A high micron range is required to increase loft in bedding products = extra warmth.
Merino Gold, Victoria	Knitwear.	Prefers under 19 micron	White	Desired, but no preference for crimp type.	80-120mm 100mm average preferred	Not important	Finer fibre produces a yarn that is stronger and easier to process. This in turns creates a more saleable, higher value product.
Velieris Pty Ltd, Victoria	Carpet.	30 micron plus	All colours	Some crimp preferred but no particular type.	100-150mm	Not important	Wants well skirted fleece with low vm (vegetable matter).

Matt Ridley

Blaydon Alpacas, NSW

Most alpaca growers have come to the industry knowing little or nothing about farming – so alpaca farmers are usually voracious learners. Here we look into some of the learning opportunities available specifically related to pasture management.

Alpaca growers generally tend to fall into clear demographic categories. They are often:

- > older
- > better-educated
- > coming to alpacas after successful earlier careers
- > involved in alpacas in a part-time or hobby capacity

These characteristics all lend themselves to alpaca enthusiasts being keen – and able – to learn more about farming. “I learnt by my mistakes”, says one prominent Victorian breeder, “and it took me a long time to appreciate that all my success in manufacturing didn’t guarantee that I knew anything at all about alpacas and farming. I should have used that experience to understand that I had to learn again; and some of that learning had to involve formal education – just as my engineering degree provided the foundation on which my manufacturing business was built”.

‘Experience is a good teacher, but she sends in terrific bills’

Minna Antrim in *Naked Truth and Veiled Allusions* (1902)

Formal courses in pasture management and related topics are offered by many Government and private institutions, and range from several hours’ duration to full four-year degree courses. We’ll concentrate on the shorter versions here.

Many of the courses mentioned here are part of the National Rural Production Training Package, under which agricultural courses are offered all over Australia. The report of the 2006 review of this package makes interesting reading, providing insights into training trends in agricultural industries generally as well as providing a comprehensive listing of available study opportunities. To see this review document in full go to:

www.hac.org.au/Documents/Reports/RTE03ReviewPhase1.pdf

Because pasture management approaches are so dependent on where you are, start locally and branch out from there. Non-governmental organisations like Greening Australia offer resources and education in pasture management issues, and they tend to operate at a regional (and therefore more relevant) level.

You’re best starting point is probably your state TAFE network. Many TAFEs offer pasture management courses or animal husbandry courses which include modules on things like pasture management. But there are some other providers you could contact.

New South Wales

The NSW Department of Agriculture runs a series of courses under its PROfarm banner. These range from the introductory one-day course, *Identification and management of native grass pastures*, through a graduated series of PROgraze courses of one to eight days’ duration. There are also plenty of venues available. For more information go to their website:

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au

Victoria

The Epping Campus of the Northern Melbourne Institute of Technology (NMIT) offers full and part-time degree courses in Agriculture and Land Management as well as the short course, *Pasture Management and Grazing*, units of which can count towards degrees, diploma and certificates. For more information go to their website:

www.nmit.edu.au

Marcus Oldham College, near Geelong, has an outstanding reputation in agricultural education, and many of its courses offer subjects in soils and pastures. You don’t have to do the whole degree or diploma if you don’t wish to, you can pick and choose the modules of interest to you. For example, the Agricultural Systems 1 module embraces units like *Crop & Pasture Management* – including *Crop Production Principles*, *Pasture Production Principles* and *Fodder Conservation*. For more information go to their website:

www.marcusoldham.vic.edu.au/farm-business-management-course-modules

South Australia

The SA Government's Natural Resources Management Board offers several short courses of interest. For example, *A Practical Guide to Rural Land Management* runs for one evening per week over eight weeks (next course October 2010) and, for \$150.00, comes with a detailed course book. For more information go to their website:

<http://www.amlnrm.sa.gov.au/EducationTraining/LandholderEducation.aspx>

Tasmania

The *PROgraze* courses (see NSW above) are also available in Tasmania through the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment. For more information ring 1300 368 550 or go to their website:

<http://www.farmpoint.tas.gov.au/farmpoint.nsf>

Queensland

This Government's Department of Environment & Resource Management produces a publication called *The Land Manager's Monitoring Guide*, which is not only a comprehensive guide to land management and the environment but is also a growing resource, with plans to soon add the results of recent research. You can follow the various modules into greater detail on specific topics by going to their website:

http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/monitoring_guide/land_practice/pasture_management.html

The Queensland Department of Primary Industry also runs some courses of interest. For more information go to their website:

www.dpi.qld.gov.au

Western Australia

The WA Department of Agriculture & Food is the vehicle for spreading that state's knowledge of pasture management.

WA has probably the most diverse soil and pasture types of any state, so the resources available at the excellent website is a good starting point. Go to their website (then go to Farm Systems for the next step):

www.agric.wa.gov.au

Distance Education

For those not able to access classes, distance education (often combined with on campus study or practical sessions) is a viable alternative. Even a short investigation into what is available by distance or on-line learning reveals that, while there are a plethora of courses offered in business, media, management and even tourism, there is little offered in the agricultural field. For example, the website below offers "nearly 200 distance education courses and take advantage of the ease and convenience of study designed to suit your lifestyle", but not one of them directly relates to the agricultural sector. But there are some opportunities if you look a little harder.

www.seeklearning.com.au

ACS Distance Education began life in 1979 as Australian Horticultural Correspondence Schools, and has grown to now deliver over 120 horticulture-related courses across Australia, one of which is *Pasture Management* (course code BAG212), a 100-hour course aimed at enabling graduates to:

- > Determine criteria for pasture selection
- > Identify pasture plants
- > Determine potential uses for specific sites
- > Assess the nutritional value of different pastures

The course is not cheap at \$726.00, but appears to be comprehensive, and promises to pay for itself quickly. Contact ACS Distance Education on (07) 5562 1088 or go to their website:

www.acs.edu.au

If you're keen to find out more about pastures and their management, and you don't have the time or inclination to undertake formal training courses, you can always simply get more reference information. This is another way for you to shortcut your learning.

The CSIRO, for example, publishes information sheets on the various facets of pasture selection, planting and management. Go to the CSIRO's website:

www.csiro.au

Or look at Greening Australia's website:

www.greeningaustralia.org.au

Or that of LandCare Australia's website:

www.landcareaustralia.com.au

Fiona Vanderbeek

Birrong Suri Alpacas, NSW



On Sunday 2 May 2010 more than 300 people attended a National Alpaca Week (NAW) event at the Visitor Information Centre in Mittagong, in the Southern Highlands of NSW. This event, organised by a group of four local studs, was significantly different to those we had previously staged, either for the 2009 NAW or as part of our own local marketing. So impressed were we with the success of this event, that we would highly recommend this format to others.

In 2009 we held a NAW 'Alpaca Trail' with our four farms open for a day. Whilst this was a lot more successful than individual Open Farm days, there were definitely limitations:

- > **Directions:** The necessity for people to get hold of a mud-map showing the location of some fairly off-the-beaten track farms. This limited the success of our media efforts – as listeners/readers needed to make direct contact and ask for a map to be sent/mailed/faxed.
- > **Point of Difference:** The need for each stud to have something 'different' to attract visitors – on the whole people visited one, perhaps two farms but rarely all four - meaning that those furthest from the freeway got the least visitors.
- > **Distance:** The travelling distance from town and between properties was probably a disincentive to some potential visitors.

And so, in planning our contribution to the 2010 NAW, we hit upon the concept of holding our event at a 'neutral' venue with easy access. Some of the options we considered were ruled out due to high hire costs, but the Southern Highlands Visitor Information Centre (VIC) was very happy to welcome us to the gardens of their centre in Mittagong. Not only did this provide us with the perfect venue, but the VIC also assisted greatly with local promotion of the event, seeing it as having benefits for both parties.

The event ran from 10am-3pm with a constant flow of visitors of all ages, the majority being local people who had heard of the event, but with the addition of incoming visitors to the area stopping at the VIC for general information. Not only were attendance numbers far in excess of those for our previous trail days, but several people attended specifically to discuss their interest in becoming alpaca owners.

On reflection we believe there were various reasons for the success of this event:

- > **Accessibility:** An easily accessible, central location at a venue well known by the local community – so no issues of forgetting the address or needing a map to find it.
- > **Neutrality and Credibility:** The neutrality of the venue and the credibility of being associated with Tourism Southern Highlands may have encouraged people to come along to learn about alpacas, without the concern that they were going to be subjected to a 'hard sell' of an individual stud's animals.
- > **Activities:** A range of activities was offered to ensure there was something for everyone.
 - > two pens of alpacas, including cria, representing huacaya and suri in a range of colours;
 - > a supervised children's activities area, including colouring-in, sticking fleece on alpaca outlines, fleece samples to take home and a 'name the cria' competition (which many adults also took part in!);
 - > fleece and end-product displays;
 - > an information area, including AAA brochures, banners and DVD, together with a discreet display of participating studs' business cards – this was the only individual advertising.

In addition to achieving its objective of public education about alpacas, this format also efficiently shared the workload amongst participants. The four studs each took responsibility for various aspects of the set-up and running of the event but, crucially, all worked closely together as a team. An additional benefit was the avoidance of having to set up one's own farm for visitors or having concerns about the security of allowing the public to access one's property.

Publicity for the event was solely from the circulation of one press release sent to the local media. The total budget for the event was zero.

In summary, we would highly recommend this approach to others when planning their 2011 NAW event. The following are keys to success:

- > **Venue:** Find a suitable venue – a Visitor Information Centre is perfect (but may require membership - in our case one participating stud is a member of Tourism Southern Highlands)
- > **Teamwork:** Participating studs must work together as a team for this type of event to be successful, and not promote themselves or their animals above those of others.
- > **Education:** The event should not be focussed on sales, but on information and education.
- > **Professionalism:** Plan an interactive, educational display that gives a professional image to your group.
- > **Publicity:** Prepare a simple but appealing media release and circulate it to local press and radio approximately one week before the event. Our local paper actually promoted the event three times in the preceding week.

As one member of our group commented, "Think of the publicity we could attract if on one weekend in the year we could have alpacas at every Visitor Information Centre in the country". Now there's a thought! 🌟



Julie McClen
Oakgrove Alpacas, NSW

– by maintaining high value fleece traits

Happy with your return on your cria fleeces, but disappointed that the value of your four year old fleeces may not cover the cost of shearing?

This is a familiar scenario that many studs across Australia experience each year when they send off their fleece to one of the fleece buying groups, only to have the value of these older fleeces be significantly below that of the animal's first or second fleece.

There are several factors that determine the price that a buyer will ultimately pay for your fleece, and these are the factors you need to concentrate on if you want to increase your fleece value. Many positive factors are often in abundance in a cria fleece or first fleece, such as low micron, low guard hair, high comfort factor and useable fleece length. But as our alpacas age they are often prone to blow out in micron, guard hair becomes more prominent, their fleece gets the prickly factor (low CF), and their fleece length reduces, especially in breeding females.

But this doesn't have to be the end of the story. It is possible to breed alpacas that are genetically predisposed to blow out less, have lower guard hair and produce useable fleece length as they age. They can do this whilst raising healthy, strong cria and maintaining a good body weight.

To start heading your herd in the direction of higher value fleece, you need to know what you are working with, and will need to test your fleeces at roughly the same time each year. Animals that are consistent year after year are more valuable to you than those that have a history of highly variable fleece tests.

So how do you get a herd that has longevity of valuable fleece traits out of a herd that doesn't currently exhibit the ability to maintain these traits?

It is true that you could limit micron blow out by reducing feed intake, but this can also have a negative effect on fleece length and reproductive capability. Alpacas who have a lot of variation in micron along the fibre staple, particularly due to inconsistent nutritional intake, may also have tenderness in their fleece which causes it to break in processing and is considered a major fault by processors.

Or you can do the opposite, and do what many will tell you not to do, supplement your alpacas' feed, at least for a period of time long enough to see the effects on the fibre micron.

Good nutrition with ample vitamins, minerals and protein will help them rear healthy cria, grow good fleece lengths and maintain good body condition to the upper end of their ability. But be aware that this process will initially create a blow out in micron if an alpaca has previously had a lower micron due to less nutrition, commonly known as environmentally fine.

But this is what you want to know.

If you want to fine up your herd, and are willing to make some hard decisions in this regard, you can use this to your advantage by selling on those alpacas that may have been environmentally fine, in favour of those able to maintain a low fibre micron when well fed. It is a useful tool for finding out who are the 'blow out' prone in your herd.

If despite your best efforts some alpaca in your herd just refuse to blow out significantly, then these are the ones with the 'x' factor as they have higher value fleece traits. With micron being a highly heritable trait, this 'x' factor is more likely to be passed on to the next generation, especially if both parents exhibit this 'stay fine' ability.

If you find none of your herd stays fine after this process, then you will need to use a proven 'stay fine' male over your females that is/was much finer than them at the same age, and start the process that way, rather than sell off the lot and start again! The resulting progeny should mostly exhibit a reduction in micron on their dams at the same age and hopefully also inherit the ability to stay finer for longer. But like all things in alpacas, it's then a waiting game to see the results of your fleece tests for the next few years.

In our experience at Oakgrove, a very low standard deviation (SD) is a factor that often goes hand in hand with these 'stay fine' alpacas, and it is useful to aim for SDs under 4.0 in young animals. We have found that even under 3.0 is becoming more common due to our long term focus on lowering SD in our herd.

Coarse guard hair that spreads throughout the body, especially into the saddle, is a negative trait that will increase your overall micron and SD, and lower your comfort factor, but more importantly reduce the price paid for your fibre. Aim for comfort factors in the 90% to 100% range in all age animals. Guard hair in your herd can be reduced significantly by matching guard hair prone females to appropriate males to reduce the guard hair in their progeny.

Sometimes introducing positive traits for fibre value and reducing negative traits will be a two or three step process, and you may not achieve it all in one generation. We use two males who between them have, in abundance, a combination of the high value fleece traits we seek. They also exhibit other desirable traits such as defined crimp, lustre, good conformation and density, which allows for a two step process that mostly produces the type of alpacas we want to breed to have a viable return on our alpaca fleece.

At times you may have to be willing to sacrifice traits to a certain extent that have no influence on fleece value, to fast track your progress in other areas, depending on how big a jump you need to make to achieve higher value fleece.

Aiming for alpacas that maintain a fleece under 20 micron for five years, then under 25 micron for the next five years will see your returns on your fleece increase substantially. Couple this with fleece lengths between 75mm to 120mm on average, with SDs always under 5.0 even in older animals, and reduced guard hair, and over time you will develop a herd of financially viable fibre producers.

You're not going to make a living from fleece returns if you don't run thousands of alpacas, but wouldn't it be nice to at least cover your shearing and husbandry costs each year?

With micron alone being 70% of the factor determining fleece value, it is worthwhile keeping this most valuable of fleece traits at the end of the scale that pays dividends. Concentrate on breeding animals that have as much fleece weight as you can achieve, whilst still maintaining longevity of high value fleece traits, and before too long this will be your reality.

Within a few years you can turn a low value fleece herd around, if you don't let those factors that are low on the value scale for high fleece return overly dictate your breeding choices. ♡

Vallon De Or'o
17.6u, 3.1 SD, 17.6 CV

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Mariah Hill

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Royal Canberra Show - the Big Country Show

Susan Nielson > Convenor

The 2010 Royal Canberra Show had lovely weather this year except for Sunday morning when the heavens briefly opened and the rain flowed. The competitors took the splash of water in their stride and the show continued. With some competitors travelling over 10 hours to attend Canberra this year, the competition was high and the quality of the animals on show made hard work for the judges. Once again with animal numbers reaching 317 the junior white males and females classes had to be split.

This year's Most Successful Huacaya Exhibitor award went to Wendy Hart and Ross Delmenico of Wyterrica Alpacas, Victoria. The diverse range of colours they brought along was well suited to

the new Colourbration Show which was included for the first time ever at the Canberra Royal. For those of you interested in Colourbration Shows the good news is that it is here to stay, so come along next year.

Fleece Show Convenor, David Rouse and his team went off site for fleece judging this year and with 220 fleeces entered they worked long hours to reach the final decisions. With potential plans to extend the fleece section next year it must be said they would be pipe dreams without David's team and their knowledge.

The silent auction was run again this year with the focus moving off the stud males and onto products that we alpaca breeders just cannot live without. I am hoping next year to have many practical products available for auction. The highlight of the auction was the donation of *Silcron Sweet Diva* by Silcron Alpacas, our Gold Sponsors this year. *Silcron Sweet Diva* was purchased by Bova Alpacas. A big thank you is extended to all of the studs that donated services and goods, the monies raised from these auctions covers little luxuries like lunches for our stewards and other volunteers. Thanks also go to those stewards and volunteers without whose marvellous efforts there would be no show.

Of course, exhibitors are the reason that so much effort is required. Some of us travel long hours to attend and we all spend time halter training and preparing our animals. While the ribbons we win are lovely the opportunity to see other animals, to see what other studs are producing, to pine over the animal we would love to have bred and to catch up with friends old and new are all great reasons to attend. I hope to see you all again in 2011. 🐾



Supreme Champion Suri
Kurrawa Just a Rebel



Supreme Champion Huacaya
Wyndarra Designer

Halter Show winners		exhibited by
Supreme Champion Suri	Kurrawa Just a Rebel	Kurrawa Alpacas
Supreme Champion Huacaya	Wyndarra Designer	Wyndarra Alpacas
Fleece Show winners		
Supreme Champion Suri Fleece	Birrong Thunderbolt	Birrong Suri Alpacas
Supreme Champion Huacaya Fleece	Plantel Illawarra Adonis	Plantel Illawarra Alpacas
Most Valuable Commercial Huacaya Fleece	Eaglewood Iron Man	Eaglewood Alpacas
Colourbration Show winners		
Best White	Wyndarra Designer	Wyndarra Alpacas
Best Light Fawn	Chachani Azzura	Chachani Alpacas
Best Medium/Dark Fawn	Wyterrica Ariel	Wyterrica Alpacas
Best Brown	Wyterrica Cayenne	Wyterrica Alpacas
Best Grey	Tarraganda Lodge Ekeko	Tarraganda Lodge Alpacas
Best Black	Hidden Lake Fantasy	Hidden Lake Alpacas

Sydney Royal Easter Show – A Show of Pride

Paul Haslin > Breed Captain

There's a lot to be proud about in this alpaca industry of ours and never was it more evident than at the Sydney showground over the Easter weekend. I sometimes hear breeders wondering what the value of shows are to our business and this show gave the answer – a demonstration of excellence! By showing the public and the agricultural community the level of excellence in our stock, our fleece, our product and our dedication to the breed we further the cause of every facet of the alpaca industry.

The fleeces had been judged on the previous weekend by Lyn Dickson. In the show ring the first class line up of nearly 400 alpacas from all across the country presented a challenge to judges, Natasha Clark and Bill Robbins who ultimately awarded the Supreme titles to a fawn adult female suri and a light fawn junior male huacaya.

Another moment of industry pride was to see six of our young alpaca breeders compete with a line up of agricultural students in the Junior Judging competition. This is a prestigious event at the Sydney Royal and congratulations go to Alex Staples for emerging the winner. All the youngsters impressed the audience and the over-judge, Helen Fritsch, with their efficiency in the show ring and their confident oral presentations. No doubt they all benefited enormously from the ad-hoc master class presented for them by a group of judges the previous day.

Perhaps what sets the Sydney Royal apart from other shows is the integration of a superlative fashion parade, staged a number of times over the weekend. This parade is now given star billing on the show calendar and the stands are packed for every performance. We are indebted to Robin Fullerton for her tireless dedication in presenting this extravaganza.

Another aspect of the show that is extremely popular with the public is the 'infotainment' presentations. As the name suggests these are informative entertainment sessions that delight the audience with wonderful alpacas and llamas whilst educating them on the history and purpose of the industry.

Four years ago the councillors of the NSW RAS asked what they needed to do to raise the Sydney Royal to the top of our showing calendar. Since that time, in what must be unparalleled co-operation between a show society and the AAA Ltd., this show has moved one step at a time, building and improving all sections of the show to become a premier showcase of alpaca. Not that anyone is resting on their laurels – already plans are under way to introduce new and exciting elements to next year's event.

Well done to all the organising committee, the volunteers and helpers, the stewards, the judges and, most of all, the exhibitors. We are proud of you. 🙌



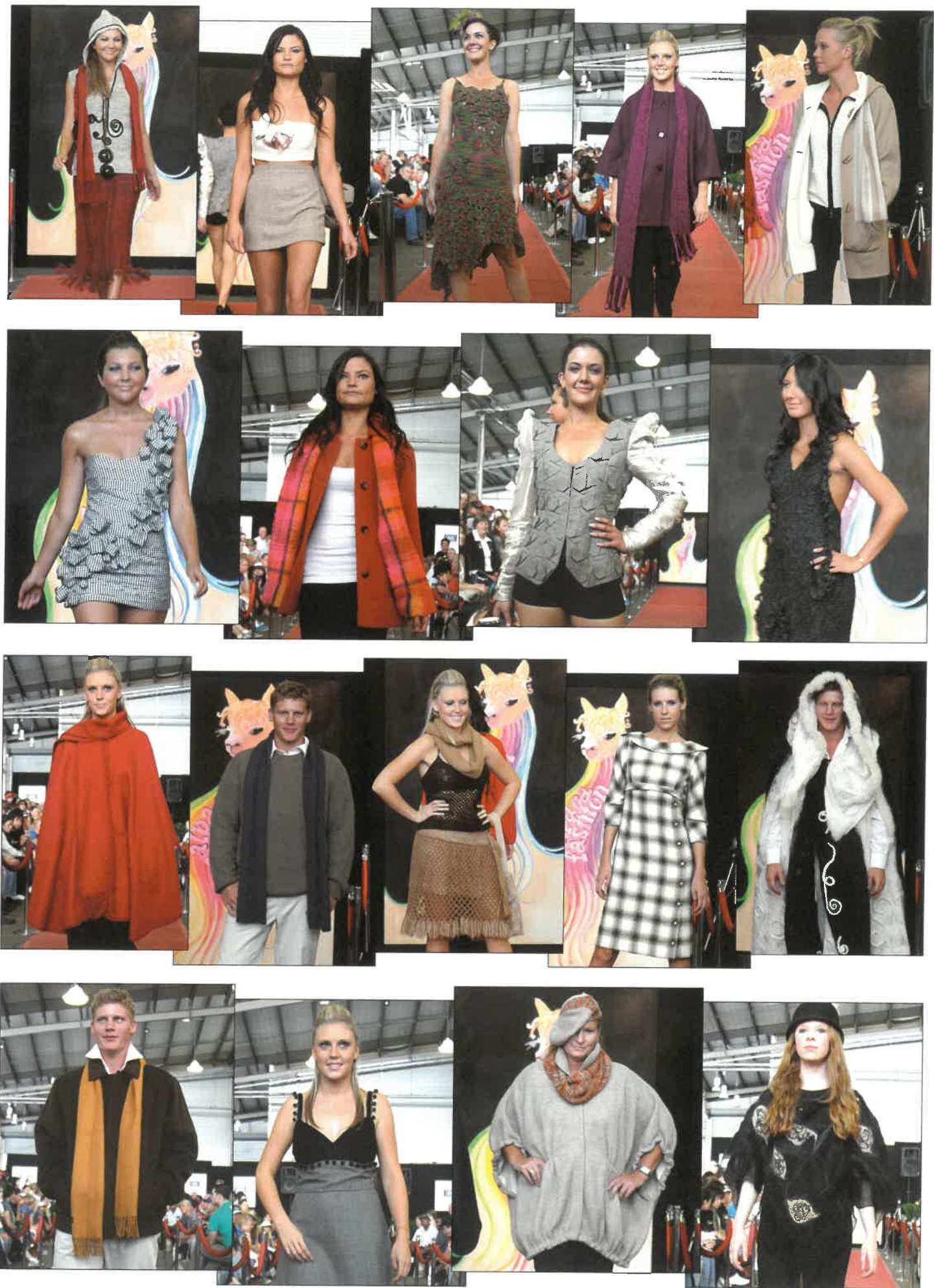
Supreme Champion Huacaya
Ambersun Fortune Seeker

Supreme Champion Suri
Surilana Heather

Halter Show winners

Supreme Champion Suri	Surilana Heather	exhibited by
Supreme Champion Huacaya	Ambersun Fortune Seeker	Surilana Alpacas
Fleece Show winners		Ambersun Alpacas
Supreme Champion Suri Fleece	Surilana Bellita ET	Surilana Alpacas
Supreme Champion Huacaya Fleece	Forestglen Concerto	Forestglen Alpaca Stud

Editor's note: The full results of the above mentioned shows are available on the AAA web site at <http://www.alpaca.asn.au/pub/news/results/results.shtml>





Handspinning Alpaca

Heather Dunn
Braeside Alpacas, NSW

Beautifully hand spun alpaca is a joy to hold. Its softness, drape and lustre make the fibre an ever increasing choice for hand spinners. In my last article, which appeared in Issue no. 59, I looked at producers presenting spinners with fleeces that are relatively clean, free of vegetable matter and well skirted. In this article we will look at spinning the fleece.

Having an understanding of hand spinning helps a non-spinner breeder to meet this market. This is not prescriptive, there are many processes out there that people use, and there are few hard and fast rules.

A lot of spinners spin first and decide on a project for the yarn later, however a bit of planning helps.

If the fleece is to be hand carded then a shorter fleece (80-90mm) will produce lovely, lofty rolags for woollen spinning.

Attenuate the rolags gently and spin softly with enough twist for single strength, but don't pinch too much air out of the single when drafting. Look out though, any hair fibres in a shorter fleece will stick out of the yarn and prick the wearer! Make sure that the fleece considered for this process is free of guard hair, and vegetable matter

(VM). I have used soft cria or tui necks this way for lovely soft scarves, and mobius scarves.

A lot of cria fleeces are long (100-150mm) and many spinners use dog combs to comb these fleeces out and then spin either from the end of each bundle or on the fold.

Fleeces for this process can afford to have a low amount of VM in it as the comb will remove some of the seeds, and weak tips will be pulled off by the combs as well. I'm not a great fan of dog combs myself, preferring wool or mini combs to draw off tops to spin rather than bundles. Whichever comb is used, static can be a problem. I use a squirt bottle with water and a dash of Unicorn Fibre Rinse in it, as it is antistatic. Just a light spray while combing quiets the fibre down and prevents fly away.

Creating soft rolags is really quick with hand carders and alpaca, as it slides easily in the carding process and is effective in creating loft in the spun yarn.



These longer fleeces can also be drum carded as long as they don't reach over 150-160mm in length and are absolutely free of VM and weak tips.

With drum carding seeds are evenly distributed in the resulting batt and clover burr can delaminate and disperse through the batt as well. The spinning of this batt would then be slow and laborious as the spinner would have to pick out the seeds often having to stop spinning to do it.

Most spinners will choose a fleece because of its colour, handle and the length that suits their preferred method of spinning. I sometimes put suggestions on some fleeces, for example, "soft and ideal for hand carding". Either way, what slows down preparation of a fleece is dirt, VM and poor skirting. Get these right and the fleeces will sell themselves.

Spinning alpaca is a pleasure as it drafts easily when well prepared or sometimes straight from a well structured fleece. For spinners who have yet

Hand carders are fabulous for processing fleece for soft airy spinning for projects such as this scarf, made from neck fibre and silk.

to attempt alpaca spinning, I suggest hand carding into rolags and spinning, using just enough tension to draw the single onto the bobbin. Too much tension will suck the single from the hands causing frustrating breaks. Initially, while adjusting to the feel of the fibre, set the ratio of the wheel low and don't treadle too fast. Once familiar, adjust the wheel to insert sufficient twist to construct a soft and lofty yarn at normal treadle speed. Too much twist will make the yarn feel ropey or harsh.

What about washing?

There are many preferences out there, but I prefer not to run dust and grit through my precision spinning wheel and scour fleeces prior to preparation. I use and recommend Unicorn Power Scour and then the Fibre Rinse, which is an anti static ph buffering conditioner that leaves the fibre soft and easy to manage.

Hand spinning is labour intensive, however its meditative qualities can be enhanced by beautiful, well prepared fleece in 22 natural shades! 🍂

Heather Dunn © April 2010



Power Scour Fibre Wash (and) Fibre Rinse

*Dirt doesn't have a chance
FULLY biodegradable and
SAFE for our waterways
USE LESS to do MORE*

"I use and endorse the products that I sell"
*Heather Dunn,
Braeside Alpacas Felt and Fibre Supplies,
Exclusive Australian Distributor for
Unicorn Fibre Products*

Heather Dunn
Phone: 02 6337 5774
info@braesidealpacas.com.au
www.braesidealpacas.com.au



Bob Kingwell
Monga Alpacas, NSW

Can Guard Hair be Bred out of Alpaca Fleece?

There are numerous articles explaining what guard hair is and why it is so undesirable, but very little seems to have been written on how to reduce guard hair in alpacas.

Guard hair generally refers to primary fibres that are fully medullated, and in alpacas this seems to occur when fibres exceed about 40 microns in diameter. These fibres are generally longer and straighter than the rest of the fibres. The industry however regards fleece with more than 5% of fibres over 30 microns to be undesirable. The degree of medullation above this diameter is usually sufficient to make garments containing these fibres feel prickly and uncomfortable against the skin.

The term 'prickle factor', or 'comfort factor' is used to express the percentage of fibres in a fleece sample that are less than or equal to 30 microns. Thus, when a sample has a comfort factor (CF) of 100%, no fibres have been measured over 30 microns in diameter. It is evident therefore that just eliminating guard hair is not sufficient. The industry goal should be the elimination of all saddle fibres that are over 30 microns. This article therefore assumes that 'guard hair' refers to these fibres.

So how can 'guard hair' be reduced? The obvious answer is, 'by breeding alpacas that have saddle fleece with a CF of 100% for at least the first few fleeces' and with no more than 5% of fibres over 30 microns after that. To achieve this it is necessary to be able to measure the ongoing degree of success or otherwise of such a breeding program.

Before a stud male can be selected it is necessary to understand the fleece characteristics that determine the CF. An easy way to do this is to look at a fleece fibre diameter histogram.

The histograms in Figures 1 and 2 are for two second fleece alpacas (usually 16 to 24 months old) and have been produced from mid side samples. The horizontal axis represents the range of fibre diameters and the vertical axis the percentage of fibres of each diameter.

The histogram at Figure 1 is tall and narrow with a short base, whereas that at Figure 2 is shorter and broader with a longer base. The position of the histogram along the horizontal axis is defined by the average fibre diameter (FD). The histogram is a visual representation of the variability of the fibre diameters in a fleece sample, and the standard deviation of fibre diameters (SD) which is a measure of this variability defines the shape of the histogram. The tail, which represents the coarsest fibres, is included in the coarse edge micron (CEM) measurement.

Other measurable characteristics, that are not directly apparent from the histogram, are the average fibre diameter and standard deviation of fibre diameters of the secondary (sFD, sSD) and primary (pFD, pSD) fibres.

Figure 1

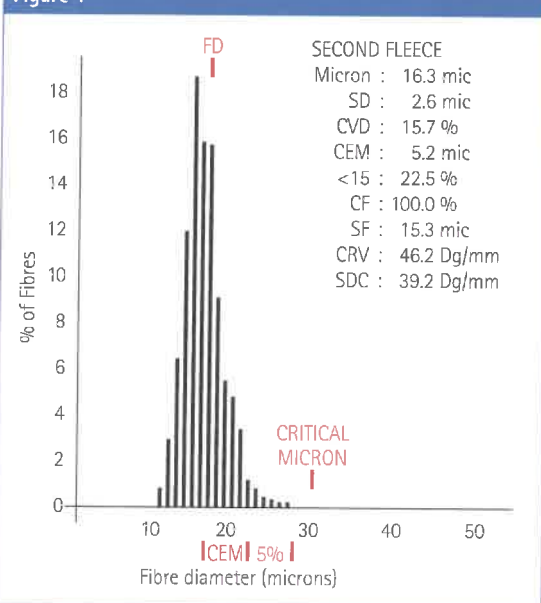
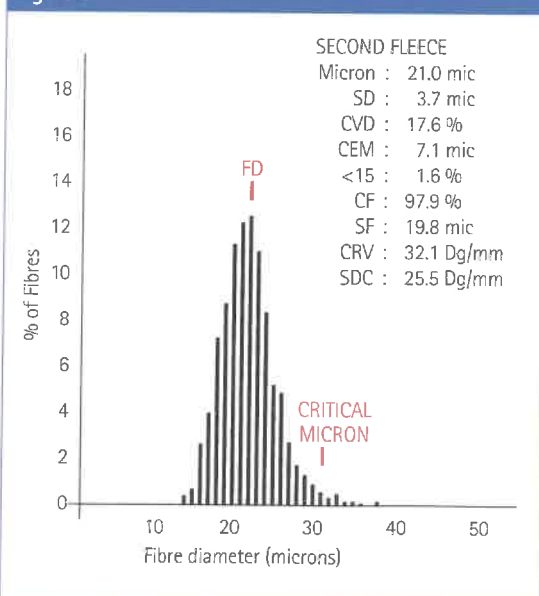


Figure 2



Average fibre diameter (FD)

The FD defines the position of the histogram along the horizontal axis. It is clear from the fleece histograms at Figures 1 and 2 that a low FD will move the histogram further away from the critical 30 micron cut off point for a CF of 100% than will a high FD. Because the FD will generally increase as an alpaca ages, it is necessary for the second fleece FD to be as low as possible if the first few fleeces are to have no 'guard hair'.

The first fleece is not always a reliable indicator because it can sometimes have a higher FD than the second fleece. There are several reasons for this. Although the fibre follicles have fully developed by the time the cria is born, not all the follicles will have produced fibres. It can commonly take up to 4 months for the cria fleece to fully develop so that fibres in this fleece will have varying lengths. The primary fibres, which are the first to develop in the unborn cria, will usually be the longest and they create the halo effect seen on some fleeces. This halo occurs when these fibres are standing straight out from the skin and is therefore not visible when the fleece is floppy. The secondary fibres are the next to develop and will not usually be as long as the primaries by first shearing. The secondary derived fibres largely develop after the cria is born and will therefore be the shortest at shearing. These are the very fine, almost fluffy fibres seen in a cria fleece. Because the primary fibres tend to be longer, straighter and stiffer than the other fibres, the tips are more easily broken when an alpaca rolls or rubs against objects. This can give the impression that some alpacas have a better fleece than they really do. It is also one of the reasons why the tip of the fleece on the micron profile graph does not usually start at the same diameter as the cut end of the previous year's sample. The FD is obtained from measured diameters taken at increments along each fibre in the sample. Therefore when the fibres are of varying lengths they will have disproportionate effects on the FD. First fleeces are also influenced by varying nutritional intakes. These include the quality of and length of access to mother's milk and access to supplementary feeding that is primarily

intended for lactating pregnant females. Males are a better indication of the success of a breeding program because they are not as exposed to these nutritional factors. Young males are often weaned earlier than females and they are not returned to the breeding herd afterwards.

Standard deviation of fibre diameters (SD)

The SD defines the shape of the histogram. It is a measure of the absolute variability of fibre diameters of a sample and is independent of the FD. From the histograms at Figures 1 and 2 it can be seen that when the SD is low the histogram is tall and narrow and when it is high the histogram is short and wide. A histogram for a second fleece with a low SD will generally have a lower FD and a shorter tail than a histogram with a high SD. This means that the tail of the low SD histogram will be further away from the critical 30 micron cut off point than that of the high SD histogram which in Figure 2 extends beyond 30 microns. The graph at Figure 3 is a plot of FD against SD and shows that there is a good correlation (0.76) between the two. The data was obtained from a herd of 67 alpacas with ages ranging from 1st to 16th fleece. Some alpacas will maintain a relatively stable SD for most of their lives. If these alpacas can be identified at an early age then a breeding program using these alpacas will progress faster than the current rate.

The standard deviation for changes in fibre diameters along the length of fibres has always been available from the micron profile graph supplied

with histogram results. This standard deviation is a measure of the variability in diameter due to environmental influences. It is now possible to obtain the standard deviation for changes in fibre diameters between the fibres in a sample. This standard deviation is a measure of the variability in diameter due to genetic influences and is therefore a more realistic measure of what an alpaca is capable of passing on to its progeny. This genetic standard deviation will always be less than the SD however the closer they are to being the same, the less environmental influences there will have been on the fleece and the lower will be the along fibre standard deviation. The genetic test is worth considering if the micron profile standard deviation is high.

Comfort factor vs fibre diameter + standard deviation

It has been shown that a low FD and SD are necessary if 'guard hair' is to be eliminated, but how low should these values be? Can one value be a bit higher and the other a bit lower and yet still achieve the same result? As it turns out it is the sum of the FD and SD that is important. There is a strong correlation (0.89) between the CF and FD+SD. This can be seen in the graph at Figure 4 which was compiled from the same herd of 67 alpacas mentioned above and whose CFs varied from 100% to 31.5%. It is evident from the graph that when FD+SD is less than 26 microns, the CF will be greater than 95% and when it is less than 21 microns, the CF will be 100%. The graph confirms the strength of FD+SD for selecting alpacas with little or no 'guard hair'.

Figure 3

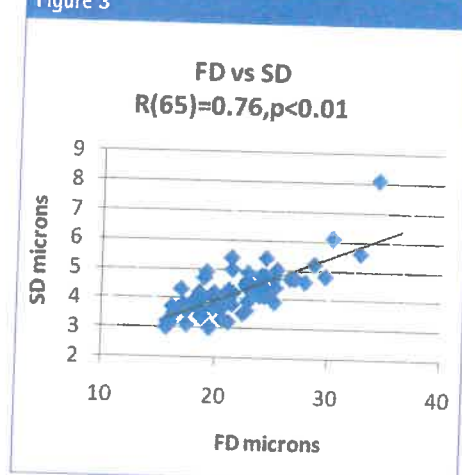
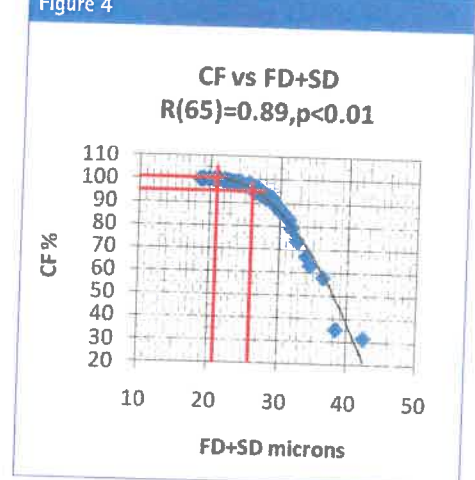


Figure 4



Coefficient of variation of fibre diameter (CV)

Although not mentioned before, this article would not be complete without a discussion of CV. The CV is obtained by dividing the standard deviation by the average fibre diameter and expressing the result as a percentage $((SD/FD) \times 100)$. It is an expression of the relative variability of a fibre sample to the FD and, as can be seen from the formula, is inversely related to the FD. The CV is therefore only useful when comparing alpacas with a similar FD.

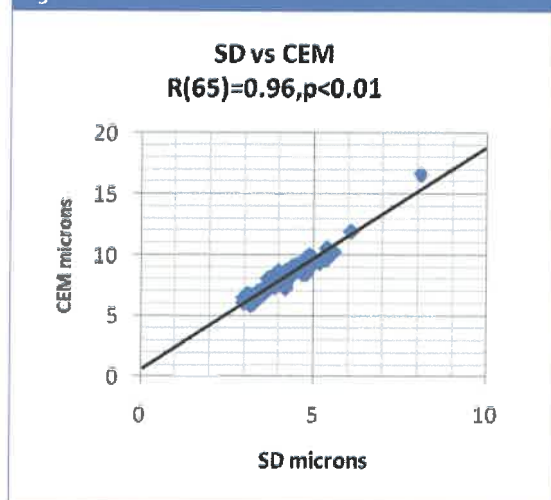
When two alpacas have the same CV but very different FDs then, although the CVs are the same, the variability or range of diameters for the lower FD will be smaller than that of the higher FD. Unlike the FD and SD which are independent variables, the CV is a dependent variable which will increase as the SD increases when the FD remains constant, but will decrease as the FD increases when the SD remains constant.

This creates a problem if alpacas are being selected for stable SDs since, as the FD increases, the CV will become smaller. This gives the illusion that the breeding program is working when clearly it is not. Therefore, because of this inverse relationship with FD, breeding for low CVs will not necessarily reduce 'guard hair'.

Coarse edge micron (CEM)

The CEM is the number of microns separating FD on the histogram from the coarsest 5% of fibres in the sample and therefore defines the position of the histogram tail (see Figure 1). A low CEM, together with a low FD, results in fewer fibres being over 30 microns. When $FD + CEM$ is equal to 30 microns then no more than 5% of fibres will be over 30 microns and the CF will be 95%.

Figure 5



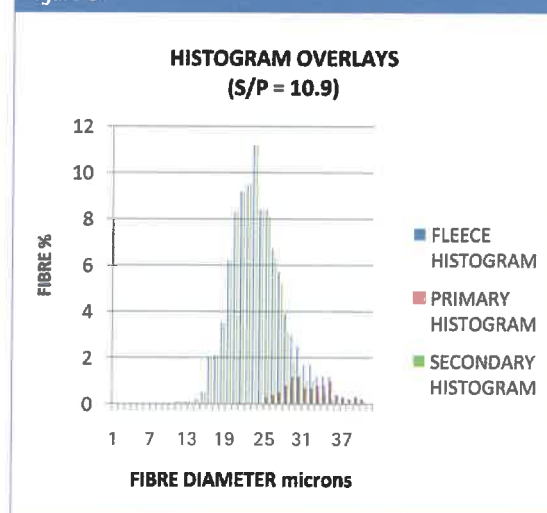
The CEM can therefore be used as another way of expressing the critical 95% CF (For the CF to be equal to or greater than 95%, $FD + CEM$ needs to be less than or equal to 30 microns). There is also a very strong correlation (0.96) between SD and CEM as can be seen from the graph at Figure 5.

This confirms that the SD defines the whole shape of the histogram including the tail. The slope of the line of best fit results in the CEM being equal to approximately twice the SD. Therefore if fleece test results do not include CEM, then $SD \times 2$ can be used as a reasonable estimate instead. Often when alpacas are being advertised the CF is not mentioned. However as long as $FD + 2SD$ is less than 30 microns then the CF will usually be at least 95%.

Secondary and primary FD and SD

The secondary and primary fibres together make up the fleece sample therefore the sum of their separate fibre diameters produce the fleece sample FD and SD. This is illustrated in the composite histogram at Figure 6 where the three separate histograms have been overlaid.

Figure 6



The S/P ratio for this fleece sample is 10.9. This means that the primary histogram represents 8.4% of the fibres tested $((1/(10.9+1)) \times 100)$. The histogram shows that although the primary fibres are largely responsible for the tail on a fleece histogram, some of the secondary fibres may also be involved. It is important therefore that both the primary and secondary fibre diameters and standard deviations be as low as possible. The aim should ultimately be to reduce the pFD to that of the sFD.

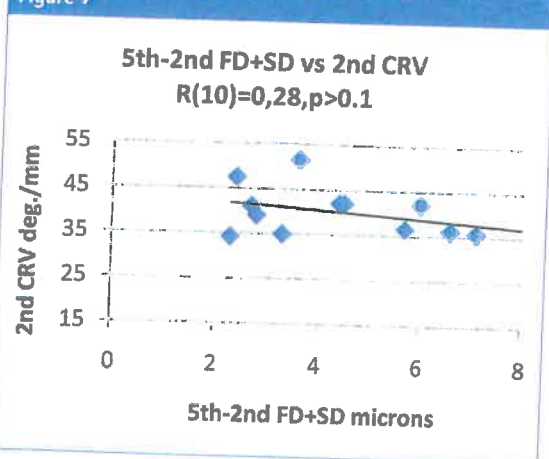
Markers for predicting future increases in FD and SD

It has been shown that if 'guard hair' is to be reduced to acceptable levels then it is necessary to breed alpacas whose $FD + SD$ remains less than 26 microns, but how can this be predicted for a second fleece male? This can only be achieved by finding a stable marker for second year fleeces that is strongly correlated to FD, SD or preferably

FD+SD and that is not age dependent. If the marker is correlated across a range of ages then it will not be stable since it will vary as the FD or SD varies with age. There are a number of possibilities including curvature, follicle density, S/P ratio, and FD+SD. There are others such as handle and lustre but, because they can only be measured subjectively, they have not been considered here.

CURVATURE (CRV): Curvature is a measure of crimp formation, and Cameron Holt in his article for Alpacas Australia, Issues 50 and 51, has indicated that there is a good correlation of -0.79 between CRV and FD. This result is based on measurements taken from 261 alpacas of varying ages. The correlation increased to -0.81 when he selected the best 97 alpacas for good crimp formation. He concluded that "micron is a strong influence on curvature". It is evident therefore that generally the higher the curvature, the lower will be the average fibre diameter. This however does not necessarily mean that CRV is a marker for stability. The graph at Figure 7 is a plot of the increase in FD+SD between 2nd and 5th fleece against 2nd fleece CRV. No significant correlation was found. Curvature is therefore not considered a useful marker for predicting stability of FD+SD.

Figure 7



FOLLICLE DENSITY (FD): An alpaca has the greatest follicle density when it is born and this density gradually decreases as the skin area increases until it is fully grown. If it is assumed that body volume is proportional to body weight and that a 12 month old alpaca maintains the same body proportions and body score as it grows then density is weight dependent rather than age dependent. It has therefore been considered as a possible marker. Although follicle density is not stable, it does decrease at a predictable rate which allows alpacas of different weights to be compared. As a rough guide the follicle density will decrease by about 6% for every 10% increase in body weight.

The graph at Figure 8 is a plot of FD against follicle density and the data was obtained from published skin test results for 37 alpacas. Unfortunately body weights were not available and the data could therefore not be adjusted for the different body weights at the time of testing. It is also probable that not all the alpacas would

have had the same body score. Despite this the graph indicates that there is only a weak negative correlation (-0.31) between FD and follicle density. This result suggests that density is not a useful marker and that breeding for density will not necessarily produce finer fleeces and therefore will not necessarily reduce 'guard hair'.

SECONDARY TO PRIMARY FOLLICLE

RATIO (S/P ratio): The secondary to primary follicle ratio is the ratio of the number of secondary (including derived secondary) to primary follicles in a sample and remains stable for the life of the alpaca. This ratio is not available from the usual fleece sample test. It is obtained by counting, under a microscope, the number of secondary follicles to each primary follicle within a number of follicle clusters on a skin sample and dividing by the number of clusters. Most primary fibres are coarser than most secondary fibres and the primary fibres are largely responsible for the tail on the histogram. It could therefore be assumed that as the S/P ratio increases then the FD would decrease.

The graph at Figure 9 however produced no correlation between the S/P ratio and FD. This result suggests that breeding for a high S/P ratio will not necessarily reduce 'guard hair'.

Figure 8

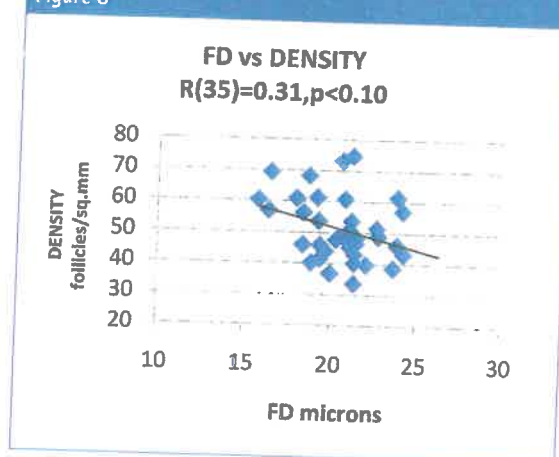
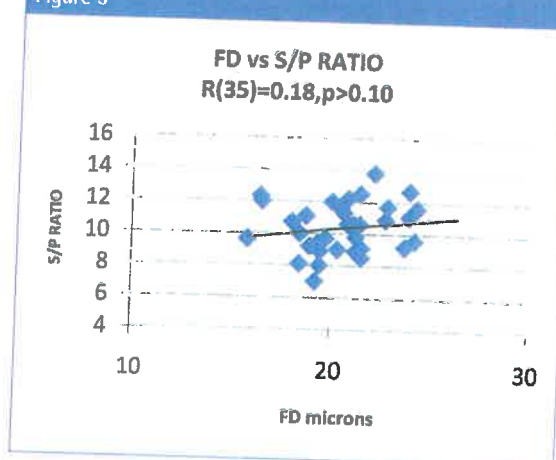


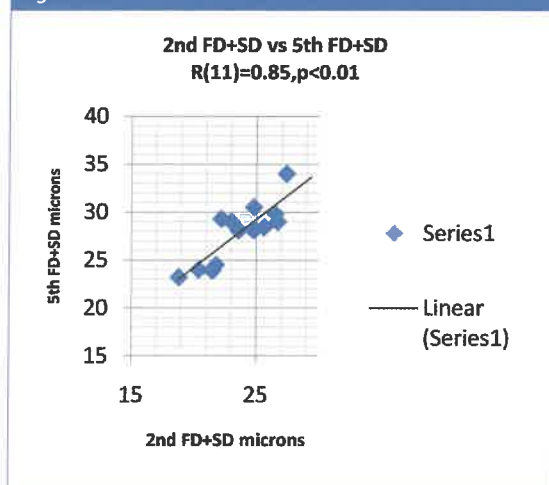
Figure 9



FIBRE DIAMETER + STANDARD

DEVIATION (FD+SD): The strong correlation between FD+SD and CF suggests that it is worth looking at the changes in FD+SD over time. No correlation was found between 2nd fleece FD+SD and the increase from 2nd to 5th fleece FD+SD. If however a low value is more stable than a high value then FD+SD would be a useful marker.

Figure 10



pass through the 15 micron intersection for the values to be stable. From the graph it can be seen that the increase averaged about 4 microns over the 3 years. The graph however is still useful because it can be used to select the better alpacas and to measure the success of a breeding program. None of the alpacas achieved 5th fleece values of less than 21 microns however four were less than the critical 26 microns for a CF greater than 95%. The disadvantage of this over a marker is of course the need to wait another three years before the better alpacas can be identified. The graph however does suggest that lower FD+SD alpacas will generally be more stable. The alpacas falling below the line of best fit are more stable than those above the line and if the slope for next year's graph intersects the vertical axis closer to 15 microns than this year's 19 microns then, because the rate of increase will have reduced, the program will be working. This result indicates that 'guard hair' can be reduced by breeding for a low rate of change in FD+SD.

Summary

There are many fleece characteristics that influence the comfort factor. However there are only two that are independent of the others. These are FD and SD. The others are useful because they help to explain why FD and SD are so important. The strong correlation between CEM and SD indicates that SD defines the tail of the histogram. The sFD, pFD, sSD and pSD are embedded within FD and SD, and together make up the FD and SD of the fleece histogram. The height and base which help to describe the shape of the histogram are defined by the SD and the position of the histogram along the horizontal axis is defined by the FD. The FD and SD together define the fleece histogram. The sum of FD and SD was found to be strongly correlated to CF and indicates that the value of FD+SD identifies the extent of 'guard hair' in a fleece sample. This strong correlation between FD+SD and CF is not surprising since the FD and SD define the position and shape of the histogram.

Most breeders are breeding for low FD and an increasing number are also breeding for low SD, however it is the sum of the two that is important in reducing 'guard hair'. Several possible markers that might identify 2 year old alpacas likely to maintain a stable FD+SD as they age have been evaluated. These include curvature, follicle density, S/P ratio and FD+SD itself. Follicle density was the only one found to have a significant correlation. It was weakly correlated to FD, however this result may have been influenced by the lack of weight information required to adjust the follicle densities for varying body weights. Although no markers were found that would predict which 2 year old alpacas would maintain a stable FD+SD, a method was found that would help to select the more stable 5 year olds and to measure progress in a breeding program. The strong correlation between 2nd and 5th fleece FD+SD shows that progress can be made in reducing 'guard hair' by breeding for low FD+SD.

Discussion

The lack of correlation between FD and S/P ratio was surprising, as was the weak correlation between FD and follicle density. In an effort to understand these unexpected results, the correlations between follicle density and S/P ratio and between follicle density and the number of follicle clusters per sq.mm were calculated. It has been assumed that a follicle cluster contains one primary follicle surrounded by a number of secondary follicles and that three clusters form a follicle group which therefore contains three primary follicles. The number of clusters can be determined by dividing the follicle density by the S/P ratio+1. No correlation was found between follicle density and the S/P ratio however a good correlation of 0.80 was found between follicle density and the number of follicle clusters (R(35)=0.80, p<0.01). This suggests that, since each cluster contains one primary follicle, fleece density is determined by the number of primary fibres. If greater density means more primaries then this reinforces the need to decrease their diameter and therefore the FD and SD. The results also suggest that, contrary to expectations, it is not the S/P ratio within a cluster that mirrors density but rather the extent of the empty spaces between the clusters. These empty spaces and therefore the number of clusters appear to have a far greater impact on density than the number of fibres within each cluster. If this is correct and the number of clusters can be increased while maintaining the same S/P ratio then obviously the density will also increase. Of course if the S/P ratio can also be increased then the fleece will be very dense indeed and it remains to be seen what might happen to the FD+SD. 🐾

NATIONAL ALPACA SHOWS 2010

New Zealand: 8-10 October

Australia: 14-17 October

**For the first time, New Zealand and Australia
will be holding their National Shows
all in the one week.**

**Thinking of a holiday that is tax deductible ???
See you downunder in October 2010.**

www.alpaca.org.nz

Ian Watt

Alpaca Consulting Services
USA

– through the eyes of an expat Australian



USA farm scene

In the two trips I made to the United States prior to deciding to live here permanently some six years ago (it seems like yesterday, where does the time go?) I saw a vibrant alpaca industry centered heavily on an incredibly successful show system which supported a very high-priced animal market.

Today the industry is suffering from the very severe economic troubles with widespread home foreclosures, severe credit restrictions, high unemployment and an investor market exercising considerable care into what they sink their dollars, and expectations, as the recovery plods along.

The change-around has been as dramatic as it has been deep but still there persists an optimism in the longer-term stakeholder sector that is both encouraging and uplifting.

It is not until one gets to live in this country that one understands the incredible wealth in America – wealth in both the sense of natural resources and in terms of money.

Underground water is, for mine, the huge resource benefit American farmers have, together with very fertile plains and valleys that sustain a wide array of agricultural pursuits. As an Australian I am in awe at the water this country has and it is, to some extent, the water that has allowed very high stocking rates that most Australian growers can only dream about. Rich soils allow excellent pastures and comprehensive road systems make traveling and transporting easy and affordable.

The money in the US alpaca industry is unbelievable!

Go to a show and see the SUVs, the trucks, semi-trailer like livestock transports (called fifth wheelers) that hook up to a pickup truck, the 5 animal horse trailers, air-conditioned trailers of all types, video cameras in trailers – many of them new, all of them carrying advertising, hundreds of them at the bigger shows – and their owners staying in the local Holiday Inn, Ramada, Sheraton, Hilton, etc. as they spend up to \$850 a pen for two animals!

Farms with barns that are good enough to live in; fencing that is decorative as well as functional; heated water bowls for crippling winters; fans for stifling humidity; 7 foot high fences to keep out bears, mountain lions and coyotes, and white tail deer that carry parasites that kill alpacas and rabies in some parts of the country; and roaming packs of dogs in what Australians would call built-up areas... there is much more to owning and running alpacas in America than what the glossy magazines and advertising portray, that is for sure!

Enticing tax credits, the benefits of lifestyle associated with alpaca raising, easy credit and easy refinancing of rapidly escalating home values fed the alpaca industry for years, helped by very, very attractive financing options offered by breeders looking for premium prices for their animals.

Everything was rosy and there was no end in sight!

Then came the home market crash, the almost disappearance of credit, home foreclosures, lack of investor confidence, defaults on alpaca financing packages, a drop in the demand for unwanted males and genuine fear of the future have all led to lots of unsold animals, a significant drop in prices, a significant rise in the number of auctions and a lowering of both the prices at auction and the clearance rates. This once vibrant and charging industry was under attack and many did not know how to work within the new market parameters.

The consequence is an industry that is very reflective of American society today – somewhat split politically (reflected in a very acrimonious AOBA election process), forced herd sales, lower attendances at shows and alpaca events, increasing payment defaults on financed animals and breeders holding females open until things improve.



AOBA Auction

The upside, and there is a significant upside for the industry in the longer term, is that savvy and cashed up buyers are getting great value for their buying dollar and that quality genetics are becoming more apparent as objectivity is more to the fore in making buying and breeding decisions. Newcomers are better educated than ever before thanks to the internet and a maturing of the industry as more and more progressive breeders become mentors in a more open industry.

ARI (the US register) continues to thrive as registrations continue unabated (to date), AOBA is beset with politics and organizational issues in an industry demanding more and more in tough times, the show system is gradually recovering and the IRS continues to offer valuable incentives to the brave.

What more can I say? This is an exciting time to be in a developing livestock industry – not unlike it was in the Australian alpaca industry when I left just those short six years ago! 🐾

US Show ring



Paul Vallely
Australian Alpaca Fibre
Testing

'Being at the crossroads' is a cliché used far too often.

It is relied upon when someone is attempting to inflate the level of importance of a point they wish to assert. The cliché, however, might not be an inappropriate description when one considers the state of the alpaca industry.

Since the early days of alpacas' popularity, breeding regimes have reflected the importance of the show ring.

The tangible results of fastidious breeding and husbandry are paraded under the subjective scrutiny of judges amid hopes of adornment with show ribbons. The ribbons satisfy the notion of 'value adding' as they appreciate the value of the successful alpaca when it is sold to another breeder – obviously with a view to more prize winning progeny.

During these shows or sales, much attention is directed to the fleeces. We utter traits such as fineness, crimp, style, lustre and uniformity. We talk of how the fleeces look and feel and we refer to a multitude of available statistics and graphs generated from testing the relevant animals' mid-side fleece samples.

However, behind the ribbons and the catalogue descriptions, there is the inescapable irony – alpacas rarely produce fleeces that cover the cost of shearing.

And yet, there is an even greater irony. Alpacas are clearly capable of producing fibre that is suitable for the most elite, the most luxurious, and often the most expensive product ranges. This fact has already been proven.

Italian fashion racks carry extrafine alpaca/wool blend suits worth tens of thousand of dollars. Eco-friendly fashion stores in Germany carry high quality garments using undyed coloured alpaca fibre, highly sought by a burgeoning number of 'environmentally conscious' consumers. With the use of innovative processing, the silkiness of suri fibre has been used for 'special wear' garments. Yet the use of premium alpaca fibre in these products is solely

limited by the availability of suitable fleece consignments – and I stress the word 'suitable'.

As the alpaca industry continues to seek its sense of purpose somewhere in the show circuits, the alpaca's natural attributes sit waiting upon a silver platter.

To illustrate the viability of producing for the premium fibre market, the following table provides the highest price achieved and the relevant market indicator for price points in the Australian superfine wool market during February 2008.

Micron	Top \$ per kg (clean)	Market indicator
13	\$833	n/a
14	\$292	\$105 (14.5)
15	\$52	\$39
16	\$36	\$22
17	\$26	\$15
18	\$24	\$14

(source Ausfine Wool Co Ltd)

To relate the above table to alpaca fibre, it has been reported that alpaca is suitable to be blended with wool that is about 3 microns finer. For instance, 15 micron wool processes in a manner similar to 18 micron alpaca. The table clearly shows the potential economic benefits of pursuing premium markets.

To reinforce this message, the Australian Alpaca Fleece Ltd (AAFL) was paying up to \$60 (AUD) for ultrafine grade alpaca fleeces (under 19 microns), while superfine fleeces (between 20 and 19 microns) were making up to \$27.50 during 2008.

However, before you jump to the conclusion that your 17 micron alpaca fleece is worth almost \$300 per kilo, there are two important points to make.

Firstly, these prices are based on the consistent supply of a reasonable volume. For ultrafine alpaca, I would suggest at least 250 kilos annually.

The second point is that the higher the price paid, the tighter the specifications.

During the set-up phase of the successful Ultrafine Bale scheme, Australian Alpaca Fibre Testing conducted a basic market analysis to identify opportunities for premium alpaca fibre by speaking to existing and potential buyers.

Alpaca fibre was generally regarded as a 'prestige' fibre with its potential to be used in a similar manner as cashmere, given its relatively low resistance to compression, ability to produce soft yarn or fabric and relatively high tensile strength. Many considered alpaca as suitable for blending with superfine/ultrafine wool for use in top end fashions.

On the negative side, there were a number of concerns.

Alpaca was seen as possessing far too many coarse fibres, both in terms of the average fibre diameter of fleeces and in terms of the incidence of 'guard hair' and other problematic fibres. It also has a reputation for variation of colour among individual fibres. Furthermore, shearing practices had resulted in contamination of fleeces with unacceptable variation in length, colour and diameter. In addition, fibre length of consigned alpaca was reported as often too long for blended processing.

Addressing these concerns is actually easier than one might think. The negative attributes of alpaca fleeces are dictated by fibre traits that are all highly heritable – with time and with the aid of latest technology and methods, they can be effectively addressed through genetic selection.

Shearing practices can be improved through grower awareness and diligence.

One important point to note is that for the alpaca industry to carve its niche into the global premium fibre market, it does not need to wait

until these genetic gains are achieved. As could be seen with the Ultrafine Bale scheme, we can still supply this market albeit with a very limited supply while we seek genetic improvement.

While developing a supply chain for the premium market, there are some critical lessons that can be learnt from the wool industry.

Premium fibre growing must be driven by market signals from existing and potential buyers. Breeding objectives should reflect what fibre processors/buyers tell us they desire – not what we want them to desire.

The supply of premium alpaca fibre must be linked to brand recognition. These brands/labels should include positive messages of welfare driven husbandry, environmentally conscious practices, quality assurance systems and images of luxury and comfort.

The brand should also include 'personalised stories' of how the fibre is grown. Letting consumers know you love your alpacas will kick goals in the top-end fashion markets.

To illustrate the importance of effective brand recognition, recent market analysis carried out by Australian Wool Innovation Ltd (AWI) found that 'Wool' is seen by consumers as itchy, while 'Merino' is seen by the same consumers as soft and luxurious.

However, the most effective marketing program will be wasted unless a consistent supply of premium alpaca fibre is being produced.

The success of the Australian Ultrafine Bale scheme has shown alpaca can be positioned as one of the world's most luxurious fibres – but only with a consumer driven focus combined with strategic breeding management and marketing systems. Once this occurs, premium alpaca fibre will offer the industry a viable and sustainable future and will breathe new life into growing the 'fibre of the gods'.

A series of workshops titled 'Premium Fleece – taking alpacas to the next level' are being conducted around Australia and New Zealand. For details, see www.aافت.com.au

AAA Joins Hands with Education System in QLD

Kelli Pfeiffer

Pfeiffer Park Alpacas, QLD

The AAA recently approved the first school to implement a Junior Handlers Course and Competition permanently into its Agricultural Studies curriculum.



The Rockhampton Grammar School put 26 Year 9 students through a five week training course on Junior Handling with the assistance of local breeder, Kelli Pfeiffer of Pfeiffer Park Alpacas, which culminated in a Junior Handler Competition that was judged during 2010 National Alpaca Week.

The students commenced term two this year with lessons under the guidance of Ag teachers and Kelli Pfeiffer using the AAA Junior Handlers Course. The school purchased the equipment for the course so that it can be run annually as part of the Ag Program. At the end of week 5, Kelli returned to the school to watch the students put through their paces one final time before judging the next day and gave some last minute tips – but she was very impressed with the overall improvement in handling skills of all the students involved.

Graeme Lunghusen of Pinjarra Alpacas (Victoria) travelled to Rockhampton to judge the students on 7 May 2010 and the school was inundated with other interested Ag students, family onlookers and a huge media contingent who were all very interested in the school's new Alpaca Program and Handling Course.

As the group was so large the AAA Queensland Region (sponsors of the competition) requested that it be split into two groups for judging purposes. We surprised the students on the day and added a new degree of difficulty – by bringing in four alpacas from Kelli's farm that had not been handled by the students before. However, the students were not phased and manoeuvred their way through the course with ease – albeit with the odd alpaca playing up from time to time, but as the judging is of the handling of the alpaca and not the alpaca itself, that can actually assist a student in gaining more points if they are able to calm and re-establish the animal back on track after a hiccup.

The day was a huge success with all students achieving over 80 points out of a possible 100, the highest points achieved on the day being 99/100! A student from each group received a 1st, 2nd and 3rd place ribbon with an overall Best Handler Ribbon awarded too. All 26 students received a Competency Certificate for obtaining a mark over 50/100.

The Rockhampton Grammar School first became interested in alpacas when one of its Ag teachers asked if she could agist alpacas at the farm for students to learn from. The Ag teacher then left the school, but the school was hooked and decided to purchase from the breeder (Agacona Alpacas) two suri maidens and two wethers.

In early 2009 the school became registered breeders by taking an Educational membership of the AAA and upgraded its program by adding a show quality huacaya female, which was pregnant to a high quality rose grey stud from Pinjarra Alpacas in Victoria. The school has since bred its first cria – a show quality medium grey huacaya female that will hit the show circuit in July this year.

The school is a beacon in the education system, adding every aspect of alpaca husbandry, breeding, showing, end use products and farming them as a successful business entity to its curriculum. The school is very enthusiastic in its support of other schools interested in adding alpacas to their Ag programs.

If schools in your area are interested in getting involved in alpacas, please contact Kelli Pfeiffer, Pfeiffer Park Alpacas (mobile: 0409 129 953 or email: pfeiffer@austarnet.com.au) and she will put you in contact with representatives from the school. 🐾

Junior Handlers Growing in Queensland

Robyn Harrison
Samsuri Alpacas, QLD

After many years of showing alpacas in Queensland, this year we decided it was time to start some Junior Handlers' classes to encourage the 'breeders of tomorrow'!

Some of our local breeders obtained sponsorship funding to purchase the equipment for the obstacle course, and this Junior Handlers' kit is packed up to be transported to each of the shows in Queensland.

The Queensland show circuit started in Nanango on 10 April 2010, and our first Junior Handlers' event was scheduled. Although the turnout was low at Nanango, we did manage better numbers the following weekend at the Toowoomba Royal on 17 April 2010 where we had eight junior handlers go through the obstacle course. The smallest participant in the 6 to 11 years age group was awarded the first prize in that class as his skills at handling the alpaca were amazing to watch in one so young!

The breeders in the Gympie area have taken the Junior Handlers' classes one step further by providing some alpaca handling training days.

The local newspaper came on board with a great editorial to encourage youngsters to attend, and the first training day saw around twenty children come along to learn the basics. The second training day was a great opportunity to practise and several additional children attended.

The local breeders have also contacted the schools in the area to encourage the students to come along and learn about alpacas.

At time of writing the Gympie Show, to be conducted on 15 May 2010, has around twenty children entered for the Junior Handlers' judging, with the possibility of more turning up on the day. We have a sponsor for the Junior Handlers' classes at Gympie, and this has allowed us to offer prize money and a trophy to the winners of the event. The junior handlers are also being offered the chance to take their alpacas in the Grand Parade wearing their ribbons, and this has generated some excitement!

Many of the children at the Gympie training day had never touched an alpaca before. They were keen and excited and as they practised their skills, their confidence grew. The smallest participant in the training day was only 6 years old, yet he was unflappable! His natural instincts and calm demeanor showed that you're never too young to be involved with alpacas.

Next year, we hope to make the obstacle course a little more difficult, so stay tuned! 🐾

2010 Toowoomba Royal
Junior Handlers Class



Taken from the eulogy written and delivered by her husband, Ian at the funeral held at the Cambewarra Estate Winery, NSW

Harriet Davison (6 March 1953 – 7 April 2010)

Harriet's life after University began as a history and English teacher. On finding that she was less than suited to this vocation she then chose to utilise her talent as a horse woman, riding track work at Warwick Farm for at time before returning to Sydney and teaching again. Frequently she came home in tears, frustrated by the futility of trying to impart knowledge to students who had no interest in learning. In contrast, she gained immense pleasure and satisfaction from the early morning training sessions she rode for Tommy Smith at Randwick. The stories and moods which she brought home from each workplace told their own story and we decided to leave the city for a new life in the country.

Harriet clearly had an extraordinary eye for animals, her devotion to their care and her keen sense of animal wellbeing could have been the basis of an outstanding career as a vet. Instead, it was channeled into alpacas. What began with the purchase of four alpacas in 1992, chosen for their designer-green habits, their beguiling appearance, and the exciting prospect of a brand new Australian industry, has burgeoned into a full-scale operation, with 600 animals and three employees, making Illawarra Alpacas one of the largest and best known alpaca studs in Australia, with a show record of which she was especially proud. For 18 years, Harriet was a fulltime alpaca breeder, with a hands-on style that made her arguably one of the world's most experienced alpaca breeders outside South America. Her passion for the animals and their fleece is well recognised in the industry, and her showing record, including Most Successful exhibitor at Sydney Royal over four consecutive years, is a reflection of that passion and her expertise.

She was quick to embrace new technologies in her zeal for accelerated genetic improvement. She regularly undertook embryo transfer programmes, and was a keen disciple of the technologies and

science of Soft Rolling Skin®, developed initially for the Merino sheep.

Harry's illness began just 18 months ago and when, finally, we had regathered our composure after receiving her diagnosis, I offered to Harriet the opportunity to nominate how best we should spend the uncertain time remaining to her. Her response was memorable: "I'm already doing what I love doing; I just want to keep doing it as long as I can". It was an immediately calming proposition: firstly, that we should do nothing different other than undertake the treatment offered, and secondly, that she so enjoyed her present life that she could imagine no better way in which to spend it.

So that is what we did. In the 18 months since the onset of the illness, my memory recalls many proud and happy family moments and my alpaca diary records that we have travelled to Peru as invited guests to APEC (an opportunity which arose as the result of my presidency of the AAA), and subsequently touring the alpaca farms and factories of the altiplano; and to China, to explore export opportunities. We have exported alpacas to Europe, hosted breeders from Germany, Italy and South Africa, attended Royal shows twice in Canberra, twice in Sydney, and, last October, Harriet drove with a truckload of alpacas to Adelaide for the Nationals. We have twice shorn around 600 alpacas, and baled and dispatched their fleece. Harriet has conducted three ET campaigns, and planned and supervised matings.

Less than one week before she died, Harriet had driven with 18 alpacas to Sydney for the Royal Show; undergone arduous treatment the following day at RPAH; and then led animals into the show ring on the subsequent day. Her first alpaca shown on that day took a blue ribbon in the first class, and went on to win Reserve Champion Junior female. Three fleeces exhibited by her won championships, and another two won reserve championships. It was a good show, but two days later she was in hospital; and in a little over two more, she had passed away.

Through all of this time, Harriet endured regular chemotherapy, painful procedures and countless blood tests, all with a positive and uncomplaining attitude, determination, spirit, hope, humour, and enormous courage. She was as brave as she was beautiful, as accepting as she was exceptional. She has been an enormous example to us all on how to deal with disability and disease.

She is a legend, an inspiration to us all. 🌟

Illawarra Yucatan and friend who were also at the funeral!



Kelli Pfeiffer

Pfeiffer Park Alpacas, QLD

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Vale Harriet Mary Davison 1953-2010

If ever there were a time to count one's friends, there can be none more apposite than that which follows the loss of a soul mate.



The tide of emails, phone calls, sms messages, flowers, cards and home-cooked meals delivered to our Cambewarra home following Harriet's recent death has been a huge source of solace to our family, and a patent demonstration to her children that their mother had relevance, influence and impact far beyond her immediate family. She was loved by an eclectic army of people drawn variously from the Cook and Davison families, the alpaca industry, university, medicine, horse racing, Frensham, Kings, skiing, and the local community. All were graciously represented by the estimated 700 people who attended her memorable and very moving funeral, but none moreso than the Australian alpaca community.

She was sent off in grand style. If there is any such thing as a good funeral, hers was magnificent.

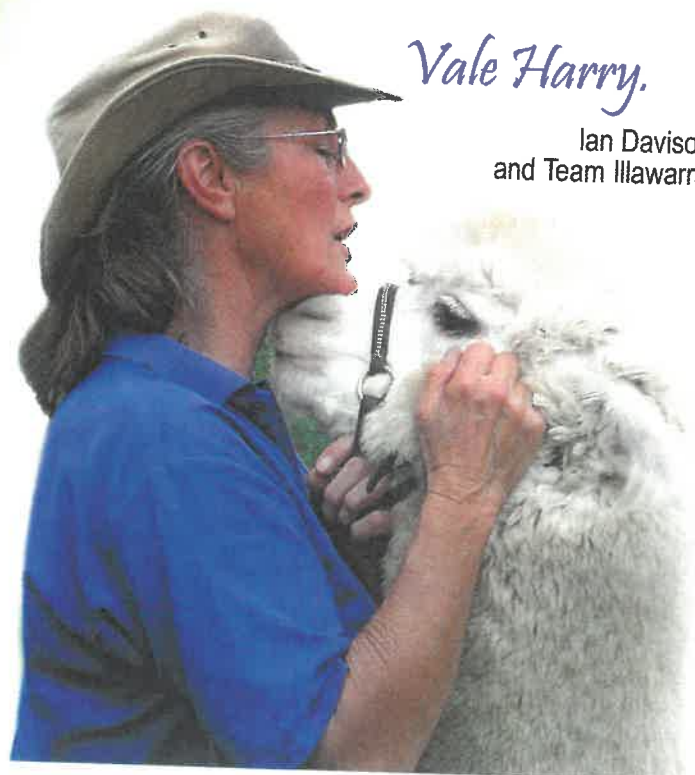
Harriet's family and Team Illawarra would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all who have, in whatever way, acknowledged her passing, shared in the celebration of her life, and mourned its too early conclusion.

As many have noted in dispatches, Harriet was a vibrant, joyous, embracing spirit, whose smile cast warmth and light upon all those whose joy it was to receive it. She rejoiced in the friendship and love of her friends and family, and had a grace and beauty which only grew with age. She was as inspired as she was inspiring.

It was my great privilege to be her partner, soul mate and lover of 25 years. I am deeply lessened by her loss, but forever enriched by her having been.

Vale Harry.

Ian Davison
and Team Illawarra





InSight Peru is an initiative of the Australian Alpaca Association, in partnership with Quechua Benefit, and with the generous support of Ramsay Health Care.

In December 2009 AAA Ltd. President, Dr Ian Davison responded on behalf of the AAA to a plea from the Quechua Benefit for medical help in Peru. And so was born a team of ophthalmologists dubbed the RAAATs of Chivay. The RAAATs (Ramsay AAA Team) are drawn from the ranks of the Ramsay Group of Private Hospitals and the AAA and they will travel to Peru in May to perform 200+ cataract surgeries on people in the Colca Valley. The project has come to be known as InSight Peru.



Demonstrating the cloudy deposit in the lens of the eye.

How a scene might appear to a person with a cataract.



Excerpts from the InSight Peru blog (<http://www.insightperu.blogspot.com/>) are reproduced here to recommend the project to you and to give 'insight' into the motivation, dedication and compassion that drives this group of people. The RAAATs fly out of Australia on 15 May 2010 and we wish them well on this journey.

Further reference to the blog address shown above will reveal the ongoing story.

Tuesday, April 06, 2010

Welcome

Welcome to the InSight Peru blog!

Until the early hours of this morning, I had only a vague idea what a 'blog' was – and I freely admit that after diligently following the prompts through Google's 'Blogs for Beginners', I have only progressed to a shade better than vague. However, hopefully the end result will serve the purpose of providing a convenient online forum for communication between those involved with the venture to Peru next month.

Posted by Stuart Randell at 6:39 AM

Friday, April 16, 2010

Thanks, Stuart, for setting up the InSight Peru blog. As most readers may already have heard, I am no longer able to accompany the RAAATs (Ramsay/AAA Team) to Peru for this exciting project due to the death of my wife of 25 years, Harriet, last week.

I am most grateful to Stuart Randell, my friend and surgical assistant for the past 20 years, for taking on the position of team leader, and for agreeing to continue the organisation and coordination of this important project.

With only four weeks to go, things are moving apace! The biggest challenge facing the Team at this time is to complete the inventory of drugs and equipment which they will be taking to Peru, as the Peruvian customs are notoriously officious, and delays are common. For example, they want the expiry dates of all medications to be taken into Peru well in advance of the date they will arrive, as well as the passport details, CVs, and qualifications of all members of the team.

The team will now comprise a group of professionals from the Nowra Private Hospital, an alpaca breeder and Ramsay Theatre sister from Victoria, and another volunteer Australian ophthalmologist. That team is Dr Stuart Randell (GP and Team Leader), Drs Dean Durkin and Chris Brown (Ophthalmologists), Dr Warren Bruce (Anaesthetist), Dr Craig Cameron (Optometrist and alpaca breeder), and Nurses Fiona Martin, Mary-Louise Laxton, Leonie Daveson and Carmen Ryan. They are presently anticipating doing up to 220 cataract operations during their visit to Chivay.

For those interested to know the whereabouts of their destination, I refer you to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chivay> for a brief description of the tiny township of Chivay (population around 5,000) in the Colca Valley. The town is at 3,600 metres altitude, but our team will need to ascend to 4,900 metres from Arequipa, before descending into the valley.

or a brief film clip of the clinic where they will be working, visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi8o-xml9Gs>

Posted by Ian Davison at 1:47 PM

Monday, April 19, 2010

A Steep Learning Curve

Less than four weeks to go before we leave, and I have finally had a free weekend to go through all of the information handed over to me by Ian. There was a lot to go through! It really impressed me, the more I read and pieced together my understanding of this mission, just how much can be achieved by a relatively small group of people who have focus and a selfless commitment to a great cause. In just on six months, InSight Peru has exploded from a flash of inspiration (or perhaps 'a rush of blood to the head') to become a fully fledged medical venture with the backing of the AAA, Ramsay Health Care, the co-support of Quechua Benefit, and a team of dedicated humanitarians working as one in the U.S., Peru and Australia. That is a fantastic achievement in itself – and we haven't even left yet!

I admit that getting to grips with the scope of this project has been a steep learning curve, but at the same time it has been impossible not to become intoxicated by the potential that InSight Peru has to make a real difference.

Posted by Stuart Randell at 6:31 AM

Friday, April 23, 2010

Good to see that the Ramsay PR machine has been in action, with press releases prompting quite a bit of media attention this past week.

Stuart has done radio interviews on local ABC radio 97.3, as well as on local radios 2ST and Shoalhaven FM, and has done interviews for the Mercury and the South Coast Register. The Mercury will be doing a feature in their Weekender supplement some time in the next few weeks, which should come out during National Alpaca Week or just before the RAAATs depart for Peru.

Many thanks to the members of the Victorian Eastern Region who had a recent dinner, at which they auctioned some items and passed the hat for Quechua Benefit, raising close to \$2,000 for InSight Peru! We have had fabulous support from these and individual AAA members. If you would like to toss in your own bit for the AAA effort, visit http://www.quechuabenefit.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=category.display&category_id=109&CFID=2319206&CFTOKEN=87105203 and follow the instructions. Your donation will be recorded and forwarded as part of the AAA contribution to the mission.

Posted by Ian Davison at 3:55 PM

Tuesday, May 04, 2010

Technology Crash Course

On reflection, my involvement with InSight Peru has forced me to confront what my children would say is my nemesis – 21st century technology! In just a few short weeks I have learned what a blog is (and actually, it seems, made one work!) and how to use the scanner, which has been lurking in the corner of my office for years. Not to mention that I finally know what a pdf file is and how to attach one to an email and send it to Peru, the US and several points in Australia simultaneously! I have sent and received more emails than I'm sure I have ever seen in my life, and opened a 'Photo Bucket' account that I am hoping will allow me to beam pictures back to Australia – to this very blog – while we are away.

Posted by Stuart Randell at 10:10 PM

Just under two weeks before the RAAATs take off, and most things seem to be falling into place. Ministry approvals, supplies, airline excess baggage approvals, overland transport and accommodation are now largely settled. The critical lens implants, which Dean has sourced for the mission, have (finally!) been dispatched from India, with breathtaking disregard for deadlines, but have yet to clear Australian customs. We are still awaiting confirmation that critical supplies of Hartmann's solution, an ionic fluid required for the surgery, will be available in adequate volumes for us in Peru.

So much to organise, so many potential stumbling blocks to foresee and avert!

The QB donation site has so far raised just over three thousand dollars in donations from the Australian alpaca community: thank you to all those who have contributed to help make this mission possible, and for the astounding generosity of a few (you know who you are!).

Stuart is trying to work out how to blog from Chivay, when finally the RAAATs arrive – it may be that he will have to phone me each day, and I will then transcribe the news onto the blog. Anyway, it's onwards and upwards (literally!) for the RAAATs.

All members of the Australian Alpaca Association and the Ramsay Hospital community have a right to feel proud at what we are about to achieve. Keep posted . . .

Posted by Ian Davison at 8:34 AM

Wednesday, May 05, 2010

Luggage Logistics

One of the most challenging logistical issues for InSight has been packing all of the equipment and medical supplies necessary to do more than 200 cataract operations, *without* exceeding the baggage allowance for our flights to Lima and beyond. This has been a nightmare for Dr Dean Durkin, who has been assembling a mountain of instruments, medications, surgical drapes, etc. for some time now – and a growing concern has been the very real possibility that we might not be able to cram all of this (indispensible) stuff into our travel bags! It was with some relief then, that I received an email today from our travel agent advising me that QANTAS (go you flying kangaroo!) will allow us an extra four bags of checked luggage at no charge. I hope we can carry them all...

Posted by Stuart Randell at 10:19 PM

RAAATs (Ramsay/Australian Alpaca Association) of Chivay

The 'RAAATs' are:

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| > Chris Brown | > Warren Bruce |
| > Craig Cameron | > Leonie Daveson |
| > Dean Durkin | > Mary Louise Laxton |
| > Fiona Martin | > Stuart Randell |
| > Carmen Ryan | |

The title 'King RAAAT' must go to Ian Davison, who has been the driving force behind InSight Peru from its inception. 🐫



I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow human being let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.

Stephen Grellet



CLAUDIO DE LA PUENTE
AMBASSADOR OF PERU

Canberra, 23 April 2010

Doctor
Ian M. Davison
President
Australian Alpaca Association Ltd.
Melbourne.-


Dear Ian,

I want to express my sincere gratitude to you, and through you thank all the people involved, particularly the doctors and sisters, as well as the Board of the Australian Alpaca Association - AAA and the Ramsay Group of private hospitals, for the realization of a cataract surgery mission to the Andean region of Chivay in the Colca Valley of Arequipa, Peru.

Your contribution, enthusiasm and generosity in providing your precious time and resources to help restore the gift of sight to the needy people of the Peruvian Altiplano constitutes a most meaningful and effective initiative and a gift that will not be forgotten.

The AAA has since its inception nurtured strong and profound ties with Peru and this noble act will significantly strengthen those links. As Ambassador of Peru I full heartedly thank you for your invaluable contribution for the improvement of the lives and welfare of hundreds of dwellers of the region of the traditional custodians of the alpaca.

Sincerely,


Claudio de la Puente
Ambassador of Peru

TTEAM Training

From haltering and leading, to toenail trimming and shearing, TTEAM training methods allow handlers and animals to interact with a minimum of stress for both parties.

Most of my students are new alpaca owners. That makes sense, since 'newbies' are looking for information about all aspects of their new-found love and they are eager to do things correctly. But I am especially honoured when a long-time owner decides to come and see what I am up to.

People who appreciate my presence in the business but really don't know what I am doing, will inaccurately characterize my work as 'good stuff for people who don't have very many alpacas and have lots of time'. Nothing could be further from the truth. I teach animal handling skills, and people that really need handling skills are those people who handle the greatest number of animals – like veterinarians and the owners of very large herds.

Of course, the bottom line is that anyone who owns alpacas can benefit from a higher level of understanding about what makes them tick and can save time and frustration by learning how to handle them.

I just returned from a clinic held in Southern California – the seventh such clinic at this same ranch. I met the owner of this ranch in the late 80s when I was just beginning to teach. She was intrigued with what I was doing and we began what has turned into an on-going collaboration. It is always fun when I do return engagements to see the way that hosts implement the techniques that I teach. In this long running relationship, I have been able to see this particular California ranch develop, just as I have. Each year, I see real progress in the old imported girls and see how much easier each new crop of weanlings is to manage. The owner told me, 'Looking back on the journey, I am amazed at just how little effort we have expended. It seems like we have avoided some bad habits and organized the ranch a little differently each year'.

A Day in the Life

This year's agenda included herd management as a topic of special emphasis. What was different about this year's visit was that I had the opportunity to experience a day in the real world of a big ranch, by helping to deworm and vaccinate eighty animals.

One of the characteristics of this California ranch are that the facilities are well organized. Lane-ways

lead to ever smaller work areas, and nearly all handling can be accomplished without haltering or leading the animals.

Once the records were checked and medications drawn, we descended on the herd at a bit after 10:00 in the morning. The animals on our list lived in two different large pastures and two additional small pastures up the hill. Each of the large pastures fed into the same small working area. The smaller pastures had their own catch pens. We began with the animals closest to our work area. Using a rope and wands, we worked the first pasture of alpacas into a small waiting area approximately 12' x 30'. From there, we moved groups of animals, ten to fifteen at a time, into another smaller area, about 12' x 12'.

When animals are worked in a group, you have several advantages. Alpacas feel safer in a group and are therefore less reactive. Additionally, because it is crowded, the animals slow each other down.

Depending on how many animals with which you intend to work, you may opt for a 10' x 10' pen or even smaller. Anything larger than 12' x 12' would not work nearly as well. Less experienced handlers will do much better in a smaller pen.

Once the animals were in the smaller working area, the ranch manager and I took turns with two different jobs. One person would catch the animal, while the other person would collect and administer the medications.

I have developed a number of different ways of catching alpacas and I feel strongly that how you catch your animals has a big impact on how they feel about humans in general and specifically how they will react to the procedure you are about to do.

Chasing an animal around a large area and grabbing it around the neck almost always provokes an attempt at fighting the handler. Fighting takes time, gets adrenaline going, and will cause the animal to behave erratically during the procedure – all of which are good reasons to look for an alternate way of catching.

The Mid-line Catch

We opted to catch each animal using a technique I call the mid-line catch. The mid-line catch does not require the use of a catch rope, and is a good compromise for people working large numbers of animals in a small space.

To use this technique, the handler approaches the animal from behind the eye and moves up to the shoulder with the arm closest to the animal outstretched. The other arm is kept by the side with the shoulder open (*photo 1*).

The idea is not to trap the alpaca in the corner – stopping movement – but more to begin to direct the movement in a convenient and predictable direction.



Photo 1: Notice that the handler is approaching from behind the eye and is making contact with the middle part of the neck rather than reaching around the neck.

The outstretched hand makes contact with the mid-line of the neck about a hand's width below the ears. Once the hand is on the neck, the handler can use his hand to steer the animal around the edge of the pen. The idea is that the animal moves around the edges of the pen and the handler stays in the center. Once the handler has control of the direction in which the animal is moving, then the other hand comes up under the jaw to gain full control of the head. With practice, you can catch animals quickly and easily using the mid-line catch without provoking the fight/flight response.

Putting the Alpaca in Balance

Once the head is in control, the handler can put the animal into balance. Putting an animal into balance is fundamentally different than restraint. A handler can put an alpaca in balance by using the full length of the arms without wrapping himself around the animal's neck. Restraint only works when the animal believes that he cannot escape from the handler. The animal figures this out by fighting like crazy and then surrendering to the handler's physical superiority. Fighting takes time, energy, and can be a real problem if you can't overpower the animal.

The technique of balancing rather than restraining provokes little in the way of resistance, saves heaps of time, and is safer and easier for the animal and the handler.

To put an animal into balance, the handler uses the alpaca's head to help the animal put its weight equally onto all four feet. Practically, this means helping the animal to stand evenly on the two front feet. More of an alpaca's weight is borne on the forequarters, and if the animal is carrying weight equally on his front feet, then in all likelihood, the hind end is also in balance. Using the head and looking at the animal's front feet, the handler uses intermittent nudges to shift the alpaca's weight equally on both front feet with the head looking forward in line with the neck, the neck in line with the body and the body over the feet.

The *most* important aspect of putting an animal in balance is that once you see that the animal is in balance, you must *release* pressure on the animal. As you begin to work with the animal, it will inevitably shift its weight and begin to fall out of balance. As the animal begins to shift its weight, the handler once again uses the head to help keep the weight evenly distributed over the front feet with the body in alignment. The process of balancing is always occurring, so in actuality, the handler working the head is constantly active, keeping the animal in balance. Alpacas that learn to stand in balance are less frightened and less likely to react to the injection.

Practice this technique and you will get better at it. The animals also get better at seeking a balanced stance on their own and become less resistant to handling.

Alpacas that learn to stand in balance are less frightened and less likely to react to the injection.

Once I caught an animal and put the animal in balance, the ranch manager approached from behind the animal's eye from the same side of the animal that I was on and would reach across the shoulder to give the injection in the crease of the neck just over the top-line. In all cases, the animal didn't move more than a step or two and offered no resistance. If the animal needed two injections, we would both move to the animal's other side, giving the injection on the animal's other side. Catching the alpaca and giving one or two injections would take perhaps a minute.

Giving Oral Medications

In addition to vaccinations, some animals needed oral wormer. One handler most easily does this. A right-handed handler begins by standing on the left side of the alpaca with the animal in balance. The handler encircles the neck with the right arm, making sure to keep the arm up high behind the ears. Keeping the arm high gives the handler more leverage. The thumb of the right hand steadies the head, the little, ring, and middle fingers steady the underside of the head. The tip of the index finger slips into the corner of the right side of the mouth on the right side (*photo 2*), making sure to keep the index finger firmly pressing against the outside of the cheek.

Tilting the head up slightly and massaging the mouth a bit after the wormer is inside the mouth helps to encourage the alpaca to swallow.



Photo 2: This is the proper position of the hand and fingers when supporting the head prior to giving oral medication.

Animals resist less when they can't back up.

The handler then slips the deworming syringe into the mouth, just alongside of the index finger (*photo 3*). Tilting the head up slightly and massaging the mouth a bit after the wormer is inside the mouth helps to encourage the alpaca to swallow. I found I was able to help in this process by standing behind the alpaca as the ranch manager gave deworming medication to each alpaca. Animals resist less when they can't back up. A handler working alone could accomplish the



Photo 3: The handler can control and support the head as the medication is administered.

same thing by beginning with the animal's behind in the corner of the pen.

We worked this way with all the animals in the lower pastures and then moved to the smaller upper pastures to work with the weanlings. As it turned out, the dreadful imported Delilah was the last animal on our list. She had just had a baby and was in the nursery pasture. Delilah is a very protective mother; a prodigious spitter; AND a 'screamer' who doesn't take kindly to human help just after birthing. We were able to ease her into a catch pen and catch her with a wand and a rope. I was able to get to Delilah's head so efficiently that she didn't have time to spit and we gave her two shots and an oral dewormer without having to shower afterwards – which was no small accomplishment!

We were ready to go to lunch at just after 12:00, finishing up in what was record time. 🐾

Author – Marty McGee Bennett

Marty McGee Bennett's first llama jumped off the back of a pickup truck and into her heart in 1981. Since then, Marty has devoted her professional life to the well being of llamas and alpacas and the education of camelid enthusiasts. Marty brings a variety of experience and qualifications to her work with camelids, including a B.S. degree in Animal Behavior. Marty's combination of TTEAM with the principals of balance and leverage make "Camelidynamics" the world's most popular and enduring training/handling system for camelids. Marty and her husband, Brad, live in Bend, Oregon. She can be contacted at marty@camelidynamics.com or visit her website: www.camelidynamics.com.

This article first appeared in *Alpacas Magazine*, Winter 2003 issue and is reproduced with the permission of the author.

Glossary of Alpaca and Husbandry Terms

Body Condition Scoring (BCS)	<p>is a popular and useful 'rule of thumb' method of determining the condition of an alpaca.</p> <p>It involves selecting a point along the central backbone of the alpaca, above the last ribs, and estimating the degree to which it protrudes from the body.</p> <p>(Refer to Alpaca Note > 4 Body Condition Scoring which is published on the AAA web site at: http://www.alpaca.asn.au/docs/about/info/4bodycondition.pdf)</p>
Cush	is the seated position of camelids.
Gestation period	the average gestation period for an alpaca is 11 to 11.5 months, but pregnancies that extend to over a year are not uncommon.
Fetlock	projects from the lower part of the leg, above and behind the foot.
Fighting Teeth	male alpacas develop six very sharp fighting teeth, two up and one down on each side at around two years of age. They can be dangerous when competitive males are together. They can be removed if required.
Heat Stress	can be a serious problem for alpacas in hot and humid weather. Signs of heat stress include drooling, open mouth breathing, drooping of the lower lip not due to inter herd confrontation, staggering and poor appetite.
Hock	is the tarsal joint of the hind leg corresponding to the human knee.
Hum	is the sound made when camelids communicate.
Hypothermia	this can occur when a set of weather conditions combine to produce extreme conditions such as a cold wind and rapidly falling temperatures, and especially if combined with extended rain periods.
Injection	<p>administration of drugs by needle for vaccinations and other health care.</p> <p>(Refer to Alpaca Note > 7 Administration of Injections which is published on the AAA web site at: http://www.alpaca.asn.au/docs/about/info/7injections.pdf)</p>
Pad	is the cushion-like flesh on the under part of the toes and feet of alpacas.
Pastern	is the part of the alpaca's foot between the fetlock and the foot.
Poll	refers to the area on top of the head in between the ears.
Toenails	<p>can require regular clipping.</p> <p>(Refer to Alpaca Note > 10 Trimming Toenails which is published on the AAA web site at: http://www.alpaca.asn.au/docs/about/info/10toenails.pdf)</p>
Unpack	give birth to a cria.
Weight	keeping track of weight changes in alpacas can aid in the early detection of health problems.
Worming	<p>medicating for the removal or prevention of internal parasites, or worms. This can be a regular husbandry task for alpacas depending on geographic location and stocking rates.</p> <p>(Refer to Alpaca Note > 11 Worms and Alpacas which is published on the AAA web site at: http://www.alpaca.asn.au/docs/about/info/11worms.pdf)</p>

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★ WINNER ★

If I had white socks I'd look just like you
Rosemarie Mason • Glen Rose Alpacas, VIC



The latest anti-spit accessory
Denise Tiyce-Mathews • Shalom Alpacas, NSW



Alpacas on guard
Sue Roberts • Tinonee Alpacas, NSW



Do you think this gum leaf is good for me?
Lindy Brown • Lindisfarne Alpacas, NSW



Whoa, don't get your head stuck
Denise Tiyce-Mathews • Shalom Alpacas, NSW



Will I have to eat that?
Denise Durrant • Alcatraz Alpacas, WA



Did someone speak?
Margie Stanley • Cuttagee Hill Alpacas, VIC



Issue 59 is terrific, just don't look at page 65!
Mark Irving • Grandeverge Alpacas, NSW



The emu look
Des Johnson • Hinchcliffe Alpacas, QLD



Pleeease let me be next
Angela Smyth • Gwandalan Alpacas, VIC



I love you too
Grace Hunter • Hillside Alpacas, TAS



Getting ready for autumn
Jenny Evans • Lynlee Alpacas, NSW



After a hard day's work
Steve Tyler + Norm Robinson
Far Far Away Alpacas, NSW



A herdy welcome
Des Johnson • Hinchcliffe Alpacas, QLD



Pippa telling Pascal a secret
Mel Semmier • Painted Pines Alpacas, SA



Perfect pair
Sue Roberts • Tinonee Alpacas, NSW



Coping with the hot weather
Alan + Pam Breese • Alpam Alpacas, VIC



Date	Event	State	Venue	Highlights	Contact
JUNE					
19-20	AlpacaFest	VIC	Werribee Park	Alpaca + fleece judging	Reg Smythe 03 5266 1459
JULY					
3	Mid North Coast Show	NSW	Kendall	Alpaca judging	Karen + Alastair Smedley 02 6566 9403
3-4	Mudgeeraba Show	QLD	Mudgeeraba Showgrounds	Promotional display	Wendy Summerell 07 5543 0000
3-4	Sunshine Coast Alpacas on Show	QLD	Eumundi Showgrounds	Alpaca judging, Junior Handler judging	Graeme + Cristin Smith 07 5445 9492
16-17	Mudgee Small Farm Field Days	NSW	Mudgee	Promotional display, alpaca + product sales	Judy Kain 02 6372 1714
16-18	Australian Sheep + Wool Show	VIC	Bendigo Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Jillian Holmes 03 5423 4237
17-18	Canning Vale Colourbration Show	WA	CAWA Southern River	Alpaca + fleece judging	Sue + Laurie Dow 08 9571 2150
25	Ballarat Show	VIC	Ballarat Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Shane Carey 03 5343 2336
31	Creswick Fleece Show	VIC	Creswick Woollen Mills	Fleece judging	John Edwards 03 5345 6169
AUGUST					
2-3	Hamilton Sheepvention	VIC	Hamilton	Alpaca + fleece judging	Andrew + Maree McCosh 03 5565 9413
5-14	Royal Queensland Show	QLD	RNA Showgrounds Brisbane	Alpaca + fleece judging	Barbara Mills 07 5465 4232
7	Annual Regional Show	NSW	Bathurst Showgrounds	Alpaca judging	Kate Bailey 02 6887 1233
7-8	Colour Classic Show	SA	Murray Bridge Racecourse	Alpaca + fleece judging, craft, art, photo competitions	Sharon Warland 08 8532 3029
14	Lardner Show	VIC	Lardner Park Warragul	Alpaca + fleece judging	Bob McLeod 03 5629 1140
21-22	Colourbration Show	VIC	Bendigo Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Deb Patti 03 5423 2020
27-29	Gold Coast Show	QLD	Parklands Showgrounds	Alpaca judging	Michelle Malt 02 6665 3324
SEPTEMBER					
4-5	Totally Alpaca Field Days	NSW	Goulburn Showgrounds	Animal displays, sale + new breeders seminar	Jim Styles 02 4829 2356
11	Kyneton Daffodil Fiesta	VIC	Kyneton	Fleece judging	Ken Haines 03 5422 3088
12	Charles Ledger Show	NSW	Collingwood House Liverpool	Alpaca judging	Heather + Phillip Vickery 02 4930 7873
25-27	Royal Melbourne Show	VIC	Royal Melbourne Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Russell Dawe 0419 308 466
25-2 Oct	Royal Perth Show	WA	Claremont Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Natasha James 0427 292 691

Date	Event	State	Venue	Highlights	Contact
OCTOBER					
1-2	Burnie Show	TAS	Wivenhoe Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Carl Cronshaw 03 6362 2107
2	Seymour Show	VIC	Seymour Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Rod + Ann Sales 03 5433 3789
4	Strathalbyn Show	SA	Strathalbyn Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Jan Bentley 08 8556 0256
7-9	Royal Launceston Show	TAS	Launceston Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Lyn Koitka 03 6363 1369
9	Wangaratta Show	VIC	Wangaratta Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Peter Harris 03 5765 2396
9	Sunbury Show	VIC	Sunbury Recreation Reserve	Promotional display	Jenny Errey 03 9457 5735
14-17	17th AAA Ltd. National Show + Sale	NSW	Australian Equine + Livestock Events Centre Tamworth	Alpaca + fleece judging, craft, art, photo competitions; Alpaca auction	AAA Ltd. National Office 03 9873 7700
16	Clare Show	SA	Clare Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Tracey Earl 08 8847 2017
17	Lancefield Show	VIC	Lancefield	Promotional display	Jenny Errey 03 9457 5735
19-21	Australian National Field Days	NSW	Borenore via Orange	Fleece judging; promotional display	John Lawrie 02 6846 7292 or Kate Bailey 02 6887 1233
23	Bendigo Show	VIC	Bendigo Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Vicki Hilder 03 5429 1803
30	Sale Show	VIC	Sale Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Bob McLeod 03 5629 1140
31	Warrnambool Show	VIC	Warrnambool Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Chris Bayley 03 5264 1739
NOVEMBER					
5	Colac Show	VIC	Colac Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Chris Bayley 03 5264 1739
12-13	Albany Show	WA	Albany Showgrounds	Fleece judging 11 Nov Alpaca judging 12 Nov Junior Handlers 13 Nov	Greg Smith 08 9845 2454
3	Alexandra Show	VIC	Alexandra Showgrounds	Alpaca + fleece judging	Bob McLeod 03 5629 1140
3	Huon Show	TAS	Ranelagh	Alpaca + fleece judging	Mark Jessop 03 6266 4380

Editor's note: Updates are available on the AAA web site at <http://www.alpaca.asn.au/pub/news/calendar/calendar.shtml>



For information please contact Sandra Wright

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BACK IN BLACK



ILR FDA Milagro's

MALOHA (1/2 Accoyo)

2009: m25.3, sd4.5, CV14.3

S:P: 9.3, FD: 35.4 DOB: 22/08/06

Owned by Azzura, Baarrooka, Caramia,
Pitchingga Ridge



ILR ABF Riptide's

ULTIMATE BLACK (1/2 Accoyo)

2009: m22.6, sd4.4, CV19.6

S:P: 8.7, FD: 36.6 DOB: 30/6/07

Owned by Azzura, Baarrooka, Romanza, Tularosa



ILR Cantano's

PHANTOM

2009: m24.9, sd5.3, CV21.4

S:P: 6.3, FD: 24.3 DOB: 14/03/05

Owned by Azzura, Baarrooka, Pacofino



ILR ABF Fine Threads'

KINGSFORD

2009: m26.4, sd5.4, CV20.3

S:P: 6.2, FD: 35.2 DOB: 30/07/07

Owned by Azzura, Baarrooka

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