

Live Science &gt; Animals

## Reference:

## Facts About Alpacas

By Alina Bradford, Live Science Contributor | November 2, 2015 10:50pm ET

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Alpacas come in 22 colors, from black to tan to white.

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Alpacas are domesticated versions of vicuñas, South American ruminants that live high in the Andes. Alpacas are related to the llama, which is a domesticated version of another wild Andean ruminant, the guanaco. While llamas are used as pack animals, alpacas are raised mainly for their soft wool. There are no wild llamas or alpacas.

Guanacos and vicuñas are found throughout the Andes Mountains. They are descended from camelids that developed in North America and migrated to South America 3 million years ago, according to Phil Switzer, an alpaca breeder based in Colorado. These animals evolved into guanacos and vicuñas, and about 6,000 years ago, people in the Andes began to domesticate them. There are two breeds of alpaca, the Huacaya and the Suri. Huacaya alpacas are more common, according to Switzer.

The main difference between the breeds is the length and fineness of the wool-like fiber, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Suri have very long fibers ("silky dreadlocks," according to Alpaca Ventures), while the Huacaya have a more compact "crimpy" fleece, with shorter fibers.

## Size

Among its relatives in the camel family, the alpaca is the smallest. The average height at the shoulder is 3 feet (91.4 centimeters), according to Switzer. They are 4 to 7 feet (120 to 225 cm) long and weigh 121 to 143 lbs. (55 to 65 kilograms), according to the University of Michigan's Animal Diversity Web (ADW).

Alpacas, however, have been exported all over the world, including the United States, New Zealand, Australia and the Netherlands, so their "habitat" is often farmland. Still, 99 percent of the world population of alpacas is found in South America, according to the ADW.

## Habits

Alpacas are very social creatures. They are gentle and curious and with training can become great pets, according to Switzer. Herds often include animals of different species or taxonomic families, such as llamas, goats and sheep, according to the FAO. \*

Alpacas spit when they are distressed or feel threatened. They will sometimes spit at each other when they are competing for food or trying to establish dominance, according to Switzer. They won't spit at people unless they have been abused.

Alpacas hum; they make a sound like "mmm," according to Alpaca Ventures. However, they also shriek when danger is present, and make a sound similar to a "wark" noise when excited. Fighting males scream, making a warbling bird-like cry.

\* Alpacas in a herd all use the same area as a bathroom instead of defecating in random areas like many animals do. This behavior helps control parasites, according to the FAO. Males often have cleaner dung piles than females, according to Alpaca Ventures. Females tend to stand in a line and all go at once.



Alpacas graze on a farm in Thailand. Originally from South America, alpacas are now raised on farms all over the world.

Credit: bluedogroom Shutterstock

## Diet

As herbivores, alpacas only eat vegetation. They eat mostly grass, but their diets can also include leaves wood, bark or stems. Like other ruminants, alpacas have a three-chambered stomach that digests the roughage efficiently.

## Offspring

Alpacas breed once a year, and as livestock they are often induced to breed at any time. The female alpaca has a gestation period of 242 to 345 days and gives birth to just one offspring between late morning and midafternoon. The birthing process can take up to seven hours, according to National Geographic.

✕

The baby alpaca, called a cria, weighs 18 to 20 lbs. (8 to 9 kg) when it is born. The cria is weaned at 6 to 8 months, and females are ready to reproduce at 12 to 15 months. Males take a bit longer to mature and are ready to mate at 30 to 36 months. Alpacas live up to 20 years.



Baby alpacas are called crias.

Credit: Labrynthe Shutterstock

## Classification/taxonomy

According to the Integrated Taxonomic Information System (ITIS), the taxonomy of the alpaca is:

- Kingdom: Animalia
- Subkingdom: Bilateria
- Infrakingdom: Deuterostomia
- Phylum: Chordata
- Subphylum: Vertebrata
- Infraphylum: Gnathostomata
- Superclass: Tetrapoda
- Class: Mammalia
- Subclass: Theria
- Infraclass: Eutheria
- Order: Artiodactyla
- Family: Camelidae
- Genus: *Vicugna*
- Species: *Vicugna pacos*

For many years, zoologists assumed alpacas and llamas had descended from guanacos, and they were classified in the genus *Lama*. However, in a 2001 paper titled "Genetic analysis reveals the wild ancestors of the llama and the alpaca" in the journal *Proceeding of the Royal Society B*, researchers showed there is "high genetic similarity" between the alpaca and the vicuña, and between the llama and the guanaco. They recommended that the alpaca be reclassified as *Vicugna pacos*.

### Conservation status

The International Union for Conservation of Nature does not have entries for alpacas or llamas on its Red List of Threatened Species. Guanacos (*Lama guanicoe*), however, are listed as Least Concern for extinction due to their wide range, large populations and occurrence in protected areas. Similarly, the IUCN lists vicuñas (*Vicugna vicugna*) as Least Concern. They have a population of 347,273 that is currently growing and is not vulnerable.

### Other facts

Llamas and alpacas can crossbreed. The offspring are called huarizo. ✕

Alpaca fur is a very prized fiber for artisans and crafters. Alpaca fur is very soft and does not retain water. It is also very durable. According to National Geographic, alpaca fur is the second strongest animal fiber, after mohair. ✕

Alpacas come in 22 colors, from a true, blue-black through browns and tans to white, according to Alpaca Ventures.

Some Andean people eat alpaca meat. In Peru, it is often served in upscale restaurants.

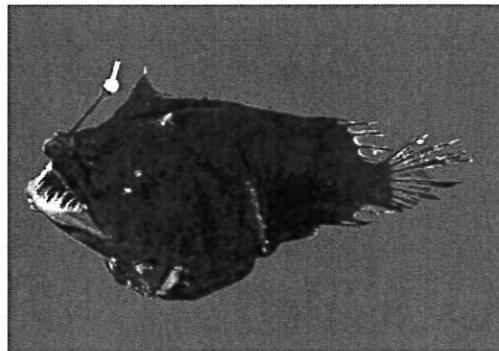
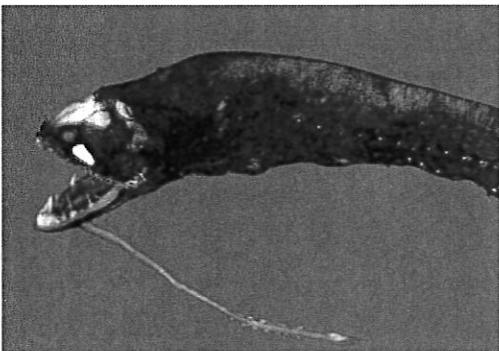
### Additional resources

- Alpaca Owners Association Inc.
- FAO: Alpaca Raising in the High Andes
- The Camelid Quarterly: The Question of Alpaca Origins

### Editor's Recommendations

- Camels: Facts, Types & Pictures
- Andes: World's Longest Mountain Range
- Giant Camels Roamed the Arctic 3.5 Million Years Ago

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**Virginia Alpacas: A Goode View Alpaca Farm, Raising Alpacas**[www.agoodviewalpaca.com/about-raising-alpacas.php](http://www.agoodviewalpaca.com/about-raising-alpacas.php) ▾

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**Alpacas: Dollars And Sense - Hobby Farms**[www.hobbyfarms.com/alpacas-dollars-and-sense-2/](http://www.hobbyfarms.com/alpacas-dollars-and-sense-2/) ▾

Feb 18, 2009 - Weird Llama and Alpaca Behaviors ... amongst their own and come to humans for treats and a **good** scratch. ... less than 10 animals, so in this case herd **management** is straightforward. ... aspects of fleece quality and incorporating breeding **practices** to improve it. .... 4 Farm Animals Children Can Raise.

**Gwynnedale Alpaca Farm: Alpacas Flourishing In Montross - Openherd**<https://www.openherd.com/.../gwynnedale-alpaca-farm-alpacas-flourishing-in-montro...> ▾

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**History on Alpacas - Michigan Alpacas - Grand Alpaca Company**[www.michigan-alpacas.com/faq-about-alpacas.html](http://www.michigan-alpacas.com/faq-about-alpacas.html) ▾

Brief history on the background of alpacas from the Grand Alpaca Company in Michigan. ... relatively easier farm lifestyle (as opposed to **raising** vegetables for example). ... to behave at all like cats or dogs, and don't make **good** domesticated pets. ... The answer to this question depends on your farm **management practices**.

**Alpacas Afield Online: Raising Alpacas For Fun and Profit**[www.alpacasafielonline.us/](http://www.alpacasafielonline.us/) ▾

**Alpacas Afield Online** - Community for the alpaca industry. ... I do my level **best** to be a **good** communicator but I am frequently surprised by what I am ... economic U.S. environment, wasteful **management practices** pushed livestock farmers and ...

**Best Alpaca Books - Walnut Creek Alpacas**

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### CURRENT TOPIC

By Lance E. Gegner  
 NCAT Agriculture Specialist  
 December 2000

Llamas or alpacas can be a good addition to the farm or ranch – an alternative livestock enterprise that fits well into a diversified farming operation. Marginal pastureland, not prime farmland, is suitable for raising llamas and alpacas with some supplemental feeding. There are currently over 200,000 llamas and over 20,000 alpacas in North America (1, 2).

There are four types of lama (the genus name is spelled with one 'l'). They are the llama, the alpaca, the guanaco, and the vicuna. All are members of the *Camelidae* family. Modified ruminants with a three-compartment stomach, they have cloven hooves and chew a cud like sheep and cattle. The llama and alpaca have been domesticated in South America for many centuries. The llama, the largest of the types, is used as a beast of burden, as a fiber source, and as a meat source in South America. The alpaca is used primarily for fiber production, but is also used as a meat source in South America. The guanaco and vicuna are wild animals that are protected from hunting in South America.

Before starting a llama or alpaca enterprise, it is advisable to visit as many existing llama or alpaca operations as possible, to pick up as many ideas and options as possible. Remember that your llama or alpaca operation will not be exactly like anyone else's, so getting varied opinions from others will help in designing for your particular needs.

One major drawback is that when starting to raise llamas or especially alpacas, the initial capital investment in breeding stock is fairly substantial. Llama or alpaca farming is considered a high-risk enterprise by banks and other agencies. A large owner investment is usually needed to obtain a loan.

There may be some tax advantages for breeders holding animals for over five years. For more information on these tax advantages, see <[www.ctalpacas.com/invest.html](http://www.ctalpacas.com/invest.html)> or discuss it with a tax accountant.

### Regulations for Llamas and Alpacas

Before considering a llama or alpaca operation, find out whether any permits or licenses are required for raising llamas or alpacas in your state. The USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service has a website <[www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/sregs/](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/sregs/)> listing U.S. states' and territories' import regulations, along with state contacts and state veterinarians' names, addresses, and phone numbers. A listing of APHIS Veterinary Services Area Offices for each state is enclosed for the benefit of those without web access.

The property where the llamas or alpacas will reside must be zoned for livestock. Check with your zoning authority before you purchase any animals. Transporting llamas or alpacas across state lines requires considerable paperwork, testing, and vaccinations. You should



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consult with your veterinarian or your state veterinary office for rules and requirements on interstate transport of llamas and alpacas.

## Llamas

Many prominent people, including William Randolph Hearst, imported llamas to the U.S. in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Since the mid-1970s, the animal has gained popularity with hobbyists.

Adult llamas' average weight can range from about 250 to 450 pounds. Their height at the shoulder is from 40 to 47 inches and at the head from 5 1/2 to over 6 feet tall. Llamas lifespans can range from 15 to over 25 years. Llamas come in a large number of colors— various shades of brown, black, white, gray, red, and beige. They range from one solid color, to various patterns and spots.

The llama price range can vary from \$200 to \$1000-plus for males and \$400 to \$3,500-plus for females (3). This price variance depends upon the age, sex of the animal (males usually cost less), quality of breeding or show stock, and location of birth or bloodlines (recent imports sell at a much higher price than domestic llamas because of improved genetic potential). Llama owners need to consider which of the creature's multiple uses will fit with their goals. Llama owners who plan to market breeding llamas will probably need to get pedigreed animals. For more information on pedigrees and registering llamas, contact the International Llama Association (4) or the International Lama Registry (5).

## Alpacas

The alpaca was first imported to the United States in 1983. Ninety-nine percent of all alpacas reside in South America (6). There are two types of alpacas, the huacaya and the suri.

Huacaya is the most common variety of alpaca. The fibre of huacaya alpacas grows perpendicular to the body. It forms a lock structure that surrounds the body with fibre, giving the animal a fluffy spongy appearance. Approximately 90 per cent of the world's alpaca are of the huacaya breed.

Suri is a less common variety of alpaca. The fibre of suri alpacas grows parallel to the body and hangs down the sides of the body in curly ringlets. Suri fibre doesn't stand out from the body, but parts along the backbone and hangs along the sides giving the animal a slender, sleek look. Approximately 10 per cent of the world's alpaca are of the suri breed (2).

Adult alpacas' average weight is about half that of an adult llama, or about 100 to 175 pounds. Their height at the shoulders is about 30 to 36 inches. The alpaca's lifespan is similar to that of a llama, averaging about 15 to 25 years. There are twenty-two natural basic colors of alpacas ranging from black to white—including many different browns, grays, tans, and creams. Alpacas tend to be more a single, uniform color than llamas, but occasionally will have white markings on the face, neck, or legs.

The price range for alpacas, like llamas, depends on age, quality, and sex. Prices can range from \$10,000 to \$30,000-plus for good-quality females and from \$1,000 for a gelding (used for companions and fiber animals) to as much as \$60,000 for a prime herdsire (7). However,

because of the small number of alpacas in North America, the main market for alpacas will probably focus on breeding stock for some time. Alpaca producers getting into marketing of breeding stock should purchase registered and blood-typed stock. Contact the Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association (8) or the International Lama Registry (5) for more information on registered alpacas.

## Marketing

Llamas and alpacas can provide only a couple sources of income: fiber and live sales.

Llamas are usually shorn annually and have a double-hair coat consisting of a fine wool fiber intermingled with stiff guard hairs. The guard hairs can be left in when making rugs and ropes. But before spinners and weavers can use the 4 to 7-inch-long llama fiber for knitting and weaving other products, the guard hairs have to be removed.

Alpacas are raised to be fiber-producing animals. They are usually shorn annually and produce about 5 to 8 pounds of fleece a year (2). Because alpacas have been bred as fiber animals, they should naturally not have any guard hairs mixed in their fiber. The price for the fiber varies according to condition and quality, but can bring from \$20 to \$40 per pound for raw fleece to \$160 per pound for finished yarn (2). *(Note that dollar amounts in this reference are stated in fluctuating Canadian dollars, about 66 cents to the U.S. dollar).* Some positive aspects of alpaca fiber are its softness, uniform fineness, and strength, while some negative aspects are its low elasticity, attractiveness to moths, and potential of being harmed by sunlight (9). However, because the fiber is hollow it provides warmth despite its light weight. Spinners, weavers, and knitters use the fiber for fine textiles. The sheared fiber from one alpaca is usually enough to make four to six sweaters (6). Since neither alpacas nor llamas produce lanolin in their fiber, the fiber does not need to be processed before it can be spun.

Live-sale uses for llamas can include breeding stock, fiber-producing stock, pack animals, cart pulling animals, golf caddies, companion pets, animals for pet therapy programs for nursing homes and schools, and guardians for sheep or goats. Live-sale uses for alpacas are mainly for breeding stock and fiber-producing stock.

Llamas and alpacas are easy to train. Accepting a halter and lead, loading into or out of a vehicle, pulling a cart, or carrying a pack, a lightweight rider, or golf bags, are easily taught with just a few repetitions. Be careful not to leave halters on all the time, and don't tie animals to any stationary object, such as a tree or post. Llamas and alpacas can break their necks trying to get away or by jerking their heads. If you have to tie the animal up and leave it unattended, always use a bungee or other elastic extension (1).



The use of llamas as pack animals is discussed in *Llama Facts for New Owners*. It states:

The llamas' centuries-old ability as a beast of burden has been rediscovered by hikers, hunters and forest work crews in North America. Their hardiness, surefootedness and common sense make them an excellent pack animal and trail companion. They are quiet, unobtrusive and so easy to manage that children love to lead them. Their great agility allows them to negotiate terrain that would be difficult or impossible for traditional pack animals, and because of their padded feet and ability to browse, they have minimal impact on the backcountry. When confronted with other pack stock, unexpected situations, and sudden movement

or noises, llamas remain calm and unruffled. Males are most commonly used for packing, and depending on maturity, weight and condition, will tote 50–120 pound packs 6–15 miles a day. An animal's performance is always relative to training, fitness and trail condition. A variety of custom packs and halters are available for llama use (10).

Guard llamas can be an alternative to guard dogs or donkeys for use as predator control with sheep and other livestock—such as geese, ducks, deer, and cattle (11). Most guard llamas are geldings. Female llamas are usually kept for breeding purposes, though the females also are good at guarding. Not all llamas have the correct characteristics to become good guard animals. More information on using guard llamas is available on several of the web-sites listed below in **Further Resources: Web-sites**, or contact ATTRA for additional information on using llamas for predator control.

A consideration for both the llama and alpaca "industries" is that the driving force for current high prices is primarily demand for breeding stock. There are few, if any, alternative markets for llamas or alpacas that would continue the high price of these animals if the breeding market decreases. While llamas and alpacas are used for meat in South America, a viable meat market in the United States is unlikely. However, the article "Llama Raising" discusses this possible marketing option.

After 15 years of breeding and selling llamas largely for pets, Gene and Jan Wells are considering the potential of utilizing their excess animals for food, as is done in South America. "Llamas are so intelligent and interactive with humans that people think you shouldn't eat them," says Jan. The Welles point out that the popularity of raising llamas in the United States has resulted in a surplus of males not suitable for breeding. They think there is a need to find uses for these excess males.

"They are only used for wool, pets, guard animals, or pulling carts, and you can only use so many for that. What will we do with the rest?" asks Gene. Llama meat is mild and tasty, but the Welles are meeting resistance as they try to persuade other breeders to consider the possibility of male llamas as food. "I think we need to develop a market for it by finding restaurants that might want to serve llama meat," Jan says. "But everyone's entitled to their own opinion." (3)

The enclosed *Commercial Alpaca Industry* is an excellent publication that focuses on many key production and marketing issues, as well as providing budgets for start-up costs and a cash flow projection. It is also available at <[www.agric.gov.ab.ca/agdex/400/491\\_830-1.pdf](http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/agdex/400/491_830-1.pdf)>. It should be remembered that dollar amounts are stated in fluctuating Canadian dollars, about 66 cents to the U.S. dollar.

The enclosed publication *Llama* has a sample budget created in 1993 that is designed for a 15-head female llama herd for a pet market. This publication is also available at <<http://ndsuext.nodak.edu/extpubs/alt-ag/llama.htm>>.

These budgets were created to aid in evaluating various alternative business enterprises. The budgets are designed to present a workable combination of inputs that will produce a given output. This combination of inputs probably doesn't represent any given farm, and the actual costs for inputs for every farm is likely different. While there may be hundreds of combinations of inputs for feed, health, labor, etc., the budgets only give one combination. Different production practices, such as improved pasture yield and quality, as well as various marketing opportunities, can cause the producer's actual budget to vary greatly.

A consideration for many llama or alpaca farmers is that llama or alpaca marketing opportunities are not readily available in their locations. Developing markets for their llama or alpaca operation can take a large amount of the operator's time and energy, and requires good "people skills" and a business plan.

Marketing of llamas and alpacas on the Internet is an option, but it does have both advantages and challenges that need to be considered. Washington State University has a publication (enclosed) and website that offer resources for farmers wanting to market their products. Both provide information on the pros and cons of Internet marketing, tips for success, links to other farmers' sites, resource lists for more information, and a glossary of Internet terms. The site location is <<http://king.wsu.edu/Ag/internetmarketing.htm>>.

Producers considering marketing over the Internet should also check out the Access Minnesota Main Street website. The website has an Electronic Commerce Curriculum that provides information on: Electronic commerce basics; Finding business information and services online; Exploring E-commerce websites; Creating your website; Promoting your website; Minnesota case studies; Developing your Internet business plan, and much more. For anyone interested in marketing on the Internet, check out the website at <[www.extension.umn.edu/mainstreet](http://www.extension.umn.edu/mainstreet)> or contact Rae Montgomery at (612) 624-2773 (e-mail: [rmontgomery@extension.umn.edu](mailto:rmontgomery@extension.umn.edu)).

## **Nutrition**

Llama and alpaca production practices are similar to those for sheep. Llamas and alpacas are adaptive feeders, eating grasses, forbs, shrubs, and trees. They can be kept on a variety of pastures and hay. About 3 to 5 llamas or 5 to 10 alpacas can be grazed per acre, depending on quality of the pasture. A bale of hay will generally feed an adult llama for a week. Because of the animals' high feed conversion, hays with high protein, like alfalfa, are not recommended because the animals can easily become overweight (2). Rotational grazing of llamas and alpacas can help utilize the pasture to a greater extent. Water needs to be accessible at all times. Using pastures to meet most of the nutritional needs of the animals will enhance profitability. Pasture is usually less costly than purchasing supplemental grains and hay.



### **Related ATTRA Publications**

Meeting the Nutritional Needs of Ruminants on Pasture

Sustainable Pasture Management

Rotational Grazing

Introduction to Paddock Design and Fencing-Water Systems for Controlled Grazing

Llama and alpaca owners need to be concerned about poisonous plants located in their pasture or hay area. Some plants can make the animals sick, while others can kill them. Many state Extension offices have publications discussing poisonous plants found in their states. A good list of poisonous plants for the Northwest region of North America can be found at <[www.smartt.com/~brianp/plantpage.html](http://www.smartt.com/~brianp/plantpage.html)>, or contact the International Llama Association (4) for information about books on poisonous plants.

During periods of stress, animals should receive supplemental grain, such as small alfalfa pellets, cracked corn, or rolled oats. Be careful if feeding straight pelleted feed because llamas frequently choke on the pellets. If pellets are fed, they should be mixed with a coarse feed, or spread out in a large pan. The producer may also put smooth rocks in the pan to keep the llamas from gobbling the pellets too fast (1). If a rich diet is continuously fed, llamas and alpacas will become fat, causing various reproduction problems varying from poor conception to poor milking. Free access to salt, minerals (with selenium in a selenium-deficient area), and clean water is essential.

### Fencing, Handling, and Transport

Most standard 4-foot-high fencing (barbed wire is not recommended because the barbs can injure their prominent eyes) is generally adequate for llamas; however, a 5-foot-high fence is recommended for alpacas. However, remember that the animals are very agile and can jump the standard 4-foot-high fences if they feel they need to do so. Fencing for llamas and especially for alpacas may need to be more substantial to control predators – especially dogs. The publication *Llama Housing & Fencing* comments:

A major threat to llamas are roaming domestic dogs, which have killed and injured many llamas. In some areas peripheral fences must be dog proof. Forty-eight-inch field fence set tight to the ground with one or two smooth wires running above it will usually discourage all but the most determined marauding dogs. Electric fence strung close to the ground or chicken wire partially buried around the outside fence is also an effective deterrent against digging dogs. Gates must also be made secure, as dogs will dig under them (12).

Producers need a small catch pen, a chute, or other safe restraint to catch llamas or alpacas for trimming toenails (see <[www.llamapaedia.com/maintenance/toenails.html](http://www.llamapaedia.com/maintenance/toenails.html)> for specific step-by-step instruction), administering vaccinations and shots, or handling an injured animal. The publication *Llama Housing & Fencing* states:

A chute built into the corner of a small corral aids the handling of routine health procedures and medical emergencies. Several portable restraint chutes designed especially for llamas have been developed, but a simple chute can be built using sturdy wooden posts and two fence poles for each side. The chute should be about 2 feet by 5.5 feet, with the top pole about 45 inches from the ground, and located so that the llama is accessible from all sides. It need not open at the front, since llamas easily learn to back out. If desired, removable plywood side panels can be wired to the side poles to form solid walls (12).

Transporting llamas and alpacas is less difficult than with most other livestock. The Llamapaedia publication *Transport* explains:

Llamas are unique among livestock in their ability to be easily transported in a wide variety of vehicles. They can climb into almost any vehicle, which will accommodate their size. Llamas are transported in trailers specifically designed for llamas, horse trailers, airport buses, school buses, full size buses with an area for llamas, pick-up trucks with cages, vans, mini-vans, and back seats of cars. Any llama, which is halter trained, can be taught to enter any of these transport vehicles (13).

Many of the Further Resources listed at the end of this publication provide excellent information on developing and planning fences and handling areas, and transporting the animals safely.

## Shelter and General Management

 A three-sided shed or other shelter should be provided for inclement weather. Llamas and alpacas do not adapt well to dark sheds, but prefer shelters with large doors or windows. For a group of five adult llamas accustomed to each other, an open shed should be at least 12 feet by 16 feet, while six mother llamas and crias can fit into a 16 by 16 foot shed. Alpacas are generally about half the size of llamas, so shelter sizes can probably be reduced.

 Llamas and alpacas are herd animals and prefer to be with other llamas and alpacas, or with other animals. In *Llama Life*, Jo Ann McGrath states:

Even responsible purchasers, who have listened to responsible owners and bought a pair of llamas, can run into trouble. As long as the two are together...they are content. If you choose to take one of them for a walk, expect the one remaining to become extremely agitated. So agitated that he may jump the fence or do damage to himself in an attempt to join you. Even in herd situations, llamas show concern when one is separated from the group (1).

Llamas and alpacas communicate with each other by ear, body and tail positions, shrill alarm calls, or a humming or low-pitch sound. Spitting among themselves is used to divert annoying suitors, protect themselves from a threat, or to help establish dominance over other animals. Occasionally they may spit at humans by accident, or if they feel threatened by the person.

Alpacas and llamas have a habit of sharing communal dunging areas called dung or potty piles. This trait makes manure cleanup easier and helps reduce the spread of internal parasites. The Llamapaedia publication *Communal Dung Piles* comments:

It also means that llamas **can be brought indoors** for parties, nursing homes or handicapped people without the risk of accidents. Dung piles are what make llamas well suited for outdoor activities like packing or golf caddies. They will not randomly go to the bathroom on the trail or the golf course. The golf courses, which allow llama caddies, provide dung piles in a few areas along the course. Clean up becomes much easier at the golf courses and along the pack trails (14).

 Even though llama and alpaca dung may be used fresh without "burning" garden plants, the dung is usually composted, then applied to the garden as an excellent fertilizer, or used as mulch. However, because llamas and alpacas will not eat dung-contaminated grass, it is not advisable to spread the dung in areas that the llamas or alpacas are supposed to graze.

## Health Concerns

Yearly vaccinations and a regular schedule for deworming are recommended to maintain animal health. It would be advisable to seek a veterinarian's advice or contact breed associations in your area for preventative health suggestions, specific nutritional requirements, or special problems prevalent in your area. Work with your veterinarian to determine what vaccination schedule is necessary to protect your animals from local disease risks. Llama Web <<http://camelid.webis.net/Vet/Location.html>> has a list of veterinarians in the United States who work with llamas and alpacas.

X Because llamas and alpacas are from the dry, thin air in the high plains and mountains of South America, heat stress is a concern during a hot, humid day. They should be sheared in the spring and a small wading pool or sprinkler may be needed to help keep them cool. They need shelter from direct sunlight, and air movement is also necessary. During the heat of summer when the heat index is 120 or more and an animal is breathing with an open mouth, is drooling, walks with a stiffness due to muscle soreness, or is unwilling to get up, assume it is in heat stress and cool it down immediately. Hosing the llama all over, immersing the animal in a pond or trough, or placing ice packs under the belly, armpits, and thighs can cool them down sufficiently until the veterinarian arrives.

X Llamas and alpacas raised where white-tailed deer are found have the possibility of becoming infected with the parasite *Parelaphostrongylus tenuis* or meningeal worm. The white-tailed deer is a natural host for the parasite, which has a fairly complex life cycle. Health problems occur when other species ingest the parasite and the meningeal worms migrate to the central nervous system and cause paralysis in the host animal. For more specific information on this parasite and possible ways to prevent infection, see the enclosure *Meningeal Worm* or the web version at <[www.llamapaedia.com/problems/meningeal.html](http://www.llamapaedia.com/problems/meningeal.html)>.

Before anyone (new or established llama or alpaca producer) buys a llama or alpaca, the buyer should check out the seller's herd and make sure the animals all look healthy, well fed, and well treated. The buyer must ask questions of the seller and learn as much as possible about the animal's health, diseases, and parasites. The buyer needs to ask about health records, breeding programs, origin of the seller's stock, proof of health tests, and status of the herd, as well as other questions needed to determine that the seller is knowledgeable.

A prospective llama breeding stock buyer particularly needs to ask whether choanal atresia has occurred in the seller's herd. Choanal atresia is a congenital defect, relatively common in llamas, that is the lack of a connection between the nose and the mouth. It makes up about 10% of all congenital defects in llamas, and is thought to be heritable. For more specific information on this defect, see the enclosure *Choanal Atresia* or the web version at <[www.llamapaedia.com/problems/choanal.html](http://www.llamapaedia.com/problems/choanal.html)>.

## Reproduction

Female llamas produce one offspring (called a cria—pronounced *creeah*) per year after a gestation of around 350 days. Alpacas also produce one cria after a gestation of about 335 days (6). Twins for both llamas and alpacas are rare. Birthing is usually quick and trouble-free, and occurs during daylight hours with the mother standing during delivery. If the female is in labor for hours, she keeps lying down and getting back up or she stays lying down on her side; contact a veterinarian for help. Crias are usually up nursing and running with the herd within an hour or so. Newborn cria llamas range in weight from about 20 to 35 pounds and newborn cria alpacas average about 15 to 20 pounds. Occasionally, new mothers do not have sufficient milk for their newborn crias. Having some frozen baggies of goat or cow colostrum (first milk) available, along with a nipple that works—flutter valve (item 126) recommended from Caprine Supply (800) 646-7736— and bottle to fit the nipple can save a cria's life (1).

The female, being an induced ovulator and able to be bred year-round, will be ready to be bred again in a week or two. Females are devoted and protective mothers and will suckle the cria until weaning at about four to six months. Age at first breeding for females should be at least 18 months old. Llamas, guanacos, alpacas and vicunas can interbreed and should be pastured separately.

Males over the age of eight months should be separated from females to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Males should not be used for breeding until after they are two years old. After the age of two, male llamas grow very sharp fighting teeth (fangs) on both the upper and lower back of their jaws. Consult a veterinarian about removing these fighting teeth to prevent injury to other males or females. The fighting teeth may grow back and need to be removed again at a later time. Males in the same pasture will fight to establish who is boss, even if one is gelded. Many veterinarians recommend that males not intended for breeding purposes be gelded. This can be done as early as six months, but usually at about two years of age. If gelded too early, many llamas may have abnormal skeletal development (6).

Sometimes cria males that are bottle fed or given too much attention at an early age, bond to people and not with other llamas. When they have bonded to humans and grow to maturity, they perceive the humans (usually male) to be in competition for females in their herd. Their behavior problems toward humans can range widely in severity. The extreme case is called Berserk Male Syndrome (BMS) or Aberrant Behavior Syndrome. Males exhibiting BMS will treat people as if they are male llamas. This can include chest butting, knocking people down, and biting them. See the enclosed article "Berserk Male Syndrome" for more specific information, or see <[www.llamapaedia.com/problems/bms.html](http://www.llamapaedia.com/problems/bms.html)>.

### **Sources for additional information**

A representative of the International Llama Association (ILA) (4) pointed out the importance of attendance at their annual conference for new producers. The information presented at the workshops may save new producers from making costly trial-and-error mistakes. Contact the ILA for information on their next conference, and about individual or farm membership fees. The enclosed listing from ILA contains many books, videotapes, magazines, and web-sites dealing with llama and alpaca production, training, and care, and is also available at <[www.internationalllama.org/html/pdf/resources.pdf](http://www.internationalllama.org/html/pdf/resources.pdf)>. There are twelve brochures dealing with all aspects of llama ownership listed on the ILA website. The ILA has about 34 affiliate regional and state associations.



Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association (AOBA) (8) holds a convention in June each year. AOBA publishes an informative breeder's directory. Members receive the quarterly magazine *ALPACAS* free. Their website has additional information concerning alpaca production.

International Llama Registry (ILR) (5) is the only U.S. registration organization for all four types of llamas. Contact the ILR for any questions regarding registration of llamas and alpacas, or for references to llama breeders in a specific area. Information is also available on their website.

Several additional electronic resources and magazines not mentioned in the enclosed ILA listings are listed in Further Resources. A search engine such as Yahoo can also be used to locate other sites on the World Wide Web.

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- 3) Paschke, Jean. 2000. Llama raising. Small Farm Today. March. p. 52-53.
- 4) International Llama Association  
PO Box 1891  
Kalispell, MT 59903  
(800) why-lama (949-5262), (406) 257-0282; Fax: (406) 257-8780  
Website: [www.internationalllama.org](http://www.internationalllama.org)  
E-mail: [ILA@InternationalLlama.org](mailto:ILA@InternationalLlama.org)
- 5) International Lama Registry (ILR)  
PO Box 8  
Kalispell, MT 59903  
(406) 755-3438 Fax: (406) 755-3439  
Website: [www.lamaregistry.com](http://www.lamaregistry.com)  
E-mail: [ilr@digisys.net](mailto:ilr@digisys.net)
- 6) Altizio, Bonnie A. and Michael L. Westendorf. 1998. Llamas and Alpacas. Rutgers Cooperative Extension, New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station. FS917. <<http://www.rce.rutgers.edu/pubs/pdfs/fs917.pdf>>. 4 p.
- 7) Anon. 2000. The Alpaca Company Primer. The Alpaca Company, Columbia, MO. 6 p.
- 8) Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association (AOBA)  
c/o Hobert Office Service, Ltd.  
1140 Manford Avenue  
PO Box 1992  
Estes Park, CO 80517-1992  
(800) 213-9522, (970) 586-5357, Fax: (970) 586-6685  
Website: [www.aoba.org](http://www.aoba.org)  
E-mail: [kenaoba@aol.com](mailto:kenaoba@aol.com)
- 9) Anon. 1996. Fiber Characteristics. Llamapaedia. <<http://www.llamapaedia.com/wool/character.html>>. 1 p.

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- 13) Anon. 1997. Transport. Llamapaedia. September 3. <<http://www.llamapaedia.com/maintenance/transport.html>>. 2 p.
- 14) Anon. 1997. Communal dung piles. Llamapaedia. September 2. <<http://www.llamapaedia.com/behavior/dung.html>>. 2 p.

## Enclosures:

Anon. 2000. APHIS Veterinary Services Area Offices. <<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/vsoffice2.html>>. 1 p.

Anon. 1997. Berserk Male Syndrome. Llamapaedia. September 21. <<http://www.llamapaedia.com/problems/bms.html>>. 2 p.

Anon. 1997. Choanal Atresia. Llamapaedia. July 13. <<http://www.llamapaedia.com/problems/choanal.html>>. 2 p.

Anon. No date. Internet Marketing for Farmers. Washington State University Cooperative Extension - King County. <<http://king.wsu.edu/ag/internetmarketing.htm>>. 6 p.

Anon. 1997. Meningeal Worm. Llamapaedia. April 13. <<http://www.llamapaedia.com/problems/meningeal.html>>. 3 p.

Dey, Dennis. 1998. Commercial alpaca industry. Ag-Ventures. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. <[http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/agdex/400/491\\_830-1.pdf](http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/agdex/400/491_830-1.pdf)>. 11 p.

Hart, Rosana and Karen Conyngham. 2000. Books, videotapes, magazines & online resources about llamas and alpacas. International Llama Association. <<http://www.internationalllama.org/html/pdf/resources.pdf>>. 11 p.

Sell, Randy. 1993. Llama. North Dakota State University Extension Service. <<http://ndsuxt.nodak.edu/extpubs/alt-ag/llama.htm>>. 7 p.

## Further Resources:

### Websites

<<http://www.rmla.com>>

Rocky Mountain Llama and Alpaca Association website.

<<http://surinetwork.org>>

Website for Suri Alpaca owner's information.

<[wysiwyg://82/http://personal.smartt.com/~brianp/](http://wysiwyg://82/http://personal.smartt.com/~brianp/)>

The llama question and answer webpage has nine sets of illustrated pages answering questions about llamas.

### Magazines

#### *AgVentures*

11950 W. Highland Ave.

Blackwell, OK 74631

Toll-free (888) 474-6397

(580) 628-4551; Fax: (580) 628-2011

<<http://agventures.com>>

Subscription rate is \$21 per year (6 issues).

Magazine deals with agricultural opportunities, occasionally on llamas and alpacas.

#### *Small Farm Today*

3903 W. Ridge Trail Road

Clark, MO 65243-9525

(800) 633-2535; FAX (573) 687-3148

<<http://www.smallfarmtoday.com>>

Subscription rate is \$23.95 per year (6 issues).

Alternative crop and livestock magazine with occasional articles on llamas and alpacas.

#### *Spin-Off*

Interweave Press, Inc.

201 E. Fourth Street

Loveland, CO 80537-5655

(970) 669-7672

<<http://www.interweave.com>>

Subscription rate is \$24.00 per year (4 issues).

Magazine for handspinners

## 10 things you didn't know about alpacas

*Spoiler alert: The fiber from their fleece is flame-resistant!*

MELISSA BREYER

September 27, 2012, 6:07 p.m.



These trendy critters come in a rainbow of colors with some of the silkiest fibers found in nature. (Photo: SimonBarrington/Shutterstock)

Alpacas may just be the cutest of all the *Camelidae* family, which includes llamas, guanacos and vicunas from South America, and Bactrian and Dromedary camels from Asia and Africa. With their floppy furry tufts, slender necks, ingénue eyes and coy Clara Bow grins, they are the “it” girls and boys of the ungulate world.

But beyond their charming, quirky good looks, these creatures are responsible for bearing some of the silkiest, most versatile fiber found in nature, for which they are shorn annually. Alpaca is a specialty fiber that has been described as stronger than mohair, finer than cashmere, smoother than silk, softer than cotton, warmer than goose down, and better-breathing than thermal knits. Along with that, alpacas themselves possess some pretty remarkable personality traits.

In 2016, September 24-26 (always the last weekend in September) is National Alpaca Farm Days, so in honor of all things *Vicugna pacos*, we're filling you in on everything you never knew about these captivating camelids.

### 1. They're ancient

Alpacas were domesticated by the Incas more than 6,000 years ago and raised for their exquisite fleece. Due to its quality and all of its superhero characteristics, alpaca fiber was reserved exclusively for the elite and nobility.

### 2. They're trendy

In the 1984, a small group of importers brought the first of a carefully selected herd to the United States and Canada, and they've been dotting the bucolic landscape ever since. The North American herd has grown from a few alpacas in zoos and private farms to about 20,000.

### 3. They grow superlative, hypoallergenic fleece

Alpaca fiber is much like sheep's wool, but warmer and not itchy. It is lacking in lanolin, which makes it hypoallergenic and also allows it to be processed without the need for high temperatures or harsh chemicals in washing.

**4. They're flame-resistant!**

Well, technically their fiber is flame-resistant, meeting the standards of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's rigid testing specifications as a Class 1 fiber for use in clothing and furnishings.

**5. They're water-resistant**

Like wool, alpaca fiber is water-resistant, but it can wick away moisture because of its unique ability to mimic cotton in moisture regain. These attributes are what make alpaca feel lighter than wool, but warmer than cotton in cool and damp climates.

**6. They come in a rainbow of hues**

Alpaca fiber comes in 16 tones that are recognized by the textile industry, from white to light rose gray to dark fawn, in addition to the blends that can be made from those, thus minimizing the need for pollution-intensive dyeing.

**7. There are two types of alpacas in this world...**

Alpacas come in two types: Suri and the huacaya. The suri has fiber that grows long and forms silky dreadlocks. The huacaya has a woolly, dense, crimped fleece — like a teddy bear — giving it a very woolly appearance. About 90 percent of all alpacas in the North America are huacayas.

**8. They can mix and match**

Alpacas and llamas can successfully cross-breed. The offspring they create are known as huarizo, which are valued for their longer fleece.

**9. They share a bathroom**

Alpacas use a communal dung pile (where they do not graze, thankfully). Because of their predisposition for using a dung pile, some alpacas have been successfully house-trained.

**10. They hum and haw ... and orgle**

Humming is the most common sound that alpacas make, which has been described as a kind of musical purring. Alpacas hum when they are curious, content, worried, bored, fearful, distressed or cautious. When startled or in danger, a staccato braying is started by one animal, then followed by the rest of the herd in the direction of the potential threat. During breeding, the male alpaca Romeo emits a unique throaty vocalization called "orgling."

During the National Alpaca Farm Days, alpaca farms across the country will open their gates to visitors of all ages to meet the woolly loves.

# Find a NAOBA Farm

Go directly to a farm...

Herd Type  State/Province

Within  Zip Code  Sort by



**Southwind Farm**  
*The Future Belongs To*  
 Generator  
 Watertown, CT

1-17 of 17 breeders

Farm	City/State	Owners	Type	Size	Miles
<a href="#"><u>ALPACAS of NH at SLEEPING MONK FARM</u></a>	NEW IPSWICH, NH	SUE & BOB EVON	Huacaya	58	46
<a href="#"><u>BLUE OPAL ALPACA FARM LLC</u></a>	STRAFFORD, NH	RUTH & JOHN	Huacaya	19	42
<a href="#"><u>Contoocook Alpaca, LLC</u></a>	Hopkinton, NH	Tom and Karen Berry	Huacaya	22	20
<a href="#"><u>Elf-Paca Meadows LLC</u></a>	Rochester, NH	Lennie & Sue Foss	Huacaya	45	50
<a href="#"><u>Foggy Bottom Ranch Alpacas, LLC</u></a>	Landaff, NH	Tracey Upton and Kathy Parsons	Huacaya	18	56
<a href="#"><u>Foss Mountain Farm Alpacas</u></a>	Eaton Center, NH	Lana Nickerson, Richard Dole	Huacaya	29	58
<a href="#"><u>Fraggle Rock Farm</u></a>	Strafford, NH	Megan and Damon Burt	Huacaya	0	42
<a href="#"><u>Kings Highway Alpacas</u></a>	Middleton, NH	Gary and Ellen Barlow	Both	31	48
<a href="#"><u>Lil Bit of Heaven</u></a>	Milford, NH	Theresa Larouche	Both	6	43
<a href="#"><u>Nodrog Farms</u></a>	Barrington, NH	Gordon & Robin Long	Huacaya	8	50
<a href="#"><u>Purgatory Falls Alpaca Farm</u></a>	Lyndeborough, NH	Tim and Dana Welch	Both	80	37
<a href="#"><u>Rough Cut Farm</u></a>	Rindge, NH	Betty Anders & Mike Anders	Huacaya	20	46
<a href="#"><u>Sallie's Fen Alpacas and Sallie's Fen Fibers, LLC</u></a>	Barrington, NH	Jack Dibb and Nicola Blake		35	50
 <a href="#"><u>Skyeview Alpacas</u></a>	Elkins, NH	Sue King	Both	93	3
 <a href="#"><u>Snowfield Alpacas LLC</u></a>	Enfield, NH	Sandi Chouinard	Huacaya	33	14
<a href="#"><u>Spring Pond Farm</u></a>	Greenfield, NH	Ray and Deb Cilley	Huacaya	16	34
<a href="#"><u>Tilton Hill Goat Farm</u></a>	Pittsfield, NH	David & Noreen Rollins		0	34



**Plain View Farm**  
 Hubbardston, VT



**Nodrog Farm**  
 We <3 Our Alpacas  
 Barrington, NH



**September Morning Alpaca Farm**  
 Happy, friendly alpaca colors.  
 Buskirk, NY

1-17 of 17 breeders

## FIND AN AOA AFFILIATE IN YOUR AREA

States/Provinces associated with

New Hampshire



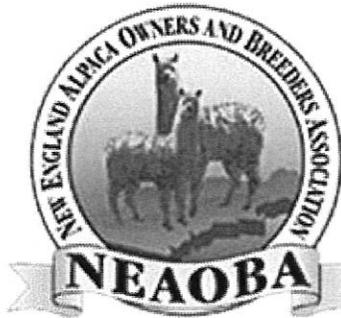
## THE SURI NETWORK

**Contact** PATTY HASSELBRING  
**Mailing Address** PO Box 1984, Estes Park, CO 80517,  
 United States

**Contact Online**

**Phone** 970-586-5876765-566-3077  
**Fax** 970-586-6685  
**Website** [www.surinetnetwork.org](http://www.surinetnetwork.org)

States/Provinces associated with



## NEW ENGLAND ALPACA OWNERS &amp; BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

**Contact** MICHAEL OLSON  
**Mailing Address** 210 Olson Drive, Brattleboro, VT 05301,  
 United States

**Contact Online**

**Phone** 802-257-4421  
**Fax**  
**Website** [www.neaoba.org](http://www.neaoba.org)

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## EMPIRE ALPACA ASSOCIATION

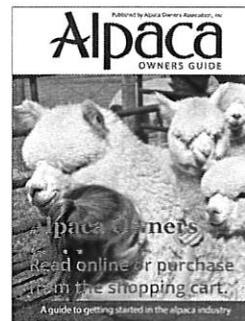


**Contact** KEN CLARK  
**Mailing Address** 707 Houghton Hill Rd, Homer, NY 13077,  
 United States

**Contact Online**

**Phone** 315-729-9358  
**Fax**  
**Website** [www.empirealpacaassociation.com](http://www.empirealpacaassociation.com)

States/Provinces associated with



**Midnight Moon @ R&R Suris**

A love of working with suri alpacas and creating an eco-friendly environment are just two reasons behind the collaboration of The Midnight Moon Alpaca Ranch and R&R Suris. Our slogan says it all...SMALL FARMS—BIG GENETICS! [Read More...](#)

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<a href="#">REGIONAL ALPACA ORGANIZATIONS</a>	<a href="#">FARMS &amp; RANCHES</a>

This page

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[Tennessee Waltz Fleece Show](#)  
 Jun 28 - 30, 2016 | Gallatin, TN
- 
[AOA National Show](#)  
 Jul 22 - 24, 2016 | Arlington, VA
- 
[The Suri Networks All Suri Fleece Show](#)  
 Aug 4 - 6, 2016 | Loveland, CO
- 
[Michigan Fiber Festival](#)  
 Aug 18 - 18, 2016 | Allegan, MI
- 
[Michigan International Alpaca Fest](#)  
 Oct 1 - 2, 2016 | Dimondale, MI

**UPCOMING MEMBER EVENTS** [VIEW ALL](#)

- [Peru Adventure 2016](#)  
 Jun 6 - 18, 2016 | Two Rivers, WI
- [Alpaca 101](#)  
 Jun 11 - 11, 2016 | Mona, UT
- [Black Sheep Gathering Wool Show & Sale](#)  
 Jun 23 - 26, 2016 | Eugene, OR
- [Alpacas at the Gathering](#)  
 Jun 24 - 26, 2016 | Eugene, OR
- [Mommy & Me Alpaca Extravaganza](#)  
 Jun 25 - 26, 2016 | Quakertown, PA

## 2016 AOA NATIONAL FLEECE CONFERENCE

July 21-24, 2016 • Arlington, Virginia

- National Fleece Show
- Auxiliary Fleece Competitions
- National Alpaca Photo Contest
- Student Design Competition
- Alpaca Fashion Show
- Education
- AOA Annual Meeting
- Vendor Opportunities

[www.FleeceConference.com](http://www.FleeceConference.com)



JULY 21-24, 2016, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

International fleeces will be accepted. Mark your calendars and plan to join us just outside our nation's capital. Visit [www.FleeceConference.com](http://www.FleeceConference.com) for more details!

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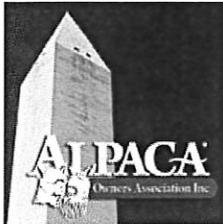


**AlpacaGram 3.55 — AOA Fiber Artist Marketplace to Showcase AOA Member Products!**

*June 9, 2016*

AOA's Fiber and Fiber Products Committee is excited to announce the first ever AOA Fiber Artist Marketplace at this year's Fleece Conference!

[READ MORE](#)

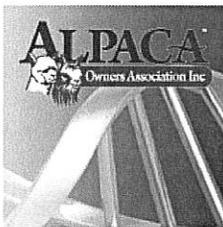


**AlpacaGram 3.54 — Early Bird registration extended through Thursday, June 9th!**

*June 2, 2016*

Early Bird pricing extended to next Thursday, June 9th, at midnight. This is going to be a great show, we are already at almost 500 fleeces!

[READ MORE](#)



**AlpacaGram 3.53 — AOA EPD calculation is coming up, get your samples sent to Yocom-McColl!**

*June 2, 2016*

With shearing season winding down, this is the perfect time to prepare and send you fleece samples to Yocom-McColl for fiber testing.

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ALPACAS FOR SALE OR STUD



**PICCHU'S MERLIN**

Huacaya Male

No Picture

**BREAKSTONE GENEVA**

Suri Female



**ESCONDIDOS MAKULU**

Huacaya Male

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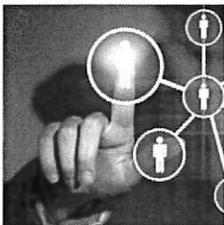
**REIMAGINE**

*February 9, 2016*



As some of you have no doubt seen, our theme for the 2016 AOA National Show & Auction is 'Reimagine.' The idea for this came about as our team was discussing the fact that so many things are dramatically different today, when compared with just a few years ago. Clearly, the industry as a whole has changed, but those changes have also meant that AOA has also needed to adapt.

[READ MORE...](#)



### Tough Decisions & A Passing Calendar Build Greatness

*September 29, 2015*

It is important to remember that success will always take time. It will always take longer than we all hope it will take and is never instantaneous. This will continue to be the case with the initiatives that the staff are currently working on and the strategic plan items that are only just beginning to be prioritized and planned for. Taking the time necessary to properly execute programs and services, will ensure the future success of AOA and the future success of all alpaca owners throughout North America.

[READ MORE...](#)



### The Largest, Most Respected Alpaca Show System in the World

*July 10, 2015*

Just a couple of weeks ago, we concluded the first ever AOA National Fleece Conference. It was a truly amazing event with spectacular speakers. However, I wanted to discuss just one part of the conference; the National Fleece Show. The fleece show contained nearly 550 entries, which was truly awesome! The room was packed full and the three judges (Diana Timmerman, Sharon Loner, and Wini Labrecque) had their work cut out for them.

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**New England Alpaca Farms**  
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## Health & Husbandry Articles

Part of the red-hot demand for alpacas in New England has to do with how easy they are to care for. New England offers the perfect climate for these hardy animals whose warm fleeces keep out the cold of the snowy winters.

Standing at just 36" tall at the withers, and weighing 140-180 lbs, alpacas are easy to halter, transport and handle. The primary care taker of these animals is more likely to be a woman in New England than a man, although many farms are operations where the entire family (including the children) is involved.

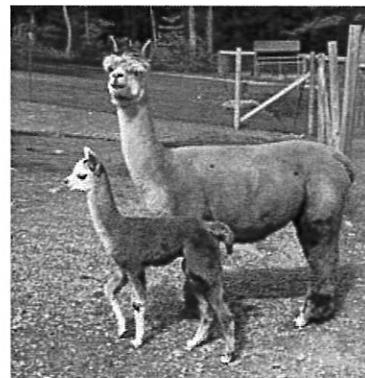
Most farms are small with 12-40 animals being the norm. Most farms have little or no heavy equipment and do not hire outside help. The land requirement for raising alpacas in New England is also small - an acre for 6 alpacas.

Alpacas require little grooming other than toenail trimming every couple of months. They do not need more than a simple three-sided shelter...and they do require certain vaccinations and anti-parasitic medications. When the new breeder sees the small is beautiful approach to alpaca farming here in New England, many say Hey...I could do this!

Discover these inquisitive and gentle creatures by visiting a NEAOBA member farm!



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## Barn Planning - Facilities for Alpacas

Author: GLAA members Lorrie and Randy Krause of Alpaca Acr

Alpacas are hardy creatures that adapt well to all climates and have minimal requirements in the way of shelter. Access to an open barn, a simple overhang or a 3-sided shed is adequate shelter from the weather during adverse conditions and provides shade during warmer seasons. Your facilities configuration should promote easy care and handling of your alpacas.

### Fencing

The perimeter fencing's main purpose is to keep predators out, rather than keep the alpacas in. Some ranches use five-wire high-tensile fencing; this may not be secure enough to keep herdsires away from breeding females or from having crias stand up on the wrong side of the fence after cushing next to it. The most widely used fencing is welded or unwelded field fencing that has smaller holes on the bottom to keep out dogs and other critters. Usually five foot high is enough to keep unwanted animals from jumping over. However, in areas of high deer population, eight-foot high fences or electric top wires may be needed to keep deer out.

### Shelters

Shelters are mostly needed to provide shade in summer and haven from winter's cold wind and snow. Typically, a simple three-sided shelter is all that is needed provided it does not face into the wind or sun. There are several excellent plans available in alpaca and livestock magazines that have storage areas configured into the shelter. See your local lumber supplier for price estimates and other suggestions.

### Catch Pen

This is a small area to catch your alpaca in to perform necessary procedures. It should be in a location that is readily accessible for you to herd your alpaca(s) into with a simple gated entry. A size that affords your alpaca room to pace but a comfortable reach to the alpaca for you is ideal; typically 8 by 10 foot. Pasture

### Pasture

The alpacas' pasture should be kept free of harmful debris and regularly inspected for dangerous mole holes and such. Keeping dung piles mowed will help battle parasites by allowing sunlight to reach the larvae and deter alpacas from graze near them.

### Alpaca Health & Welfare

- [Integrated Parasite Control](#)
- [FAMACHA Scoring](#)
- [Why and How To Do Sheep & Goat Fecal Egg Counts](#)
- [Alpaca Husbandry](#)
- [Alpaca Breeding and Birthing](#)
- [Alpaca Feeding - Forage Testing](#)
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## Alpaca Husbandry

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### How to Manage Feed for High Quality

Author: Barbie Tilton, Someday Farm Alpacas

Feed quality is something that is a partnership in the livestock industries. Feed mills do their best to deliver the highest quality feed. The rest is up to the farm personnel to maintain that feed to the point of consumption.

Winter poses a special challenge to keep feed fresh, but with proper bin management, the effects of winter can be diminished. Be sure to place all feed off the ground when storing and in a feed bin of some sort for feeding out.

Feed should be fully used before the next load is started. Dumping new feed on top of old is not recommended. Some types of feed lose their nutrients after a short time after being opened.

Periodically inspect the bin checking for cracks, breakage or holes and replace or repair if needed. Be sure the bin lid seats correctly at the top in the closed position, this will keep feed fresh and keep out bugs or rodents.

Brushing, washing or air blasting any feed that is sticking to the inside of a bin is recommended to help prevent the propagation of mold in the bin. By doing so, you are preventing the spread of mycotoxins and other contaminants of feed from reaching your livestock.

### How to cut the cost of cria coats

Author: Susan Evon, Sleeping Monk Farm

I find buying cria coats in all the various sizes to become very expensive so I go to consignment shops and purchase as many zip up fleece vests as I can find. I buy sizes from toddlers to about size 6 or so, in a great variety of colors.

They cost \$2 to \$3 a piece and they are machine washable and dryable. I put the cria's front legs in the armholes and zip the zest up the cria's back. They don't slip off and they provide great coverage for the cria's internal organs and also some neck protection. Give one a try. I find them much better than the professionally manufactured cria coat, and you can buy about 10 fleece vests for the price of 1 cria coat.

### How to milk an Alpaca

Author: Liz & John MacEachran, Kilblaau Farm

Sometimes you need to milk an alpaca. Maybe a cria is a little slow getting started, or maybe a dam is engorged and you just want to relieve the pressure for her. I am not a good alpaca milker. You need a syringe that fits the alpaca. We needed to strip milk off a girl with huge, engorged teats so we used a 60cc syringe, but sometimes a 20 or even a 10 might work. You're going to fit the tube over the whole teat and hold it against the udder to create suction.

First remove the plunger and cut off the needle end of the syringe so it is one consistent diameter its whole length. Now reinsert the plunger from the cut end. This way the smooth uncut end of the tube will rest against the alpaca. Ready?

Place the syringe over the teat and hold it against the skin of the udder. Now pull the plunger part way out. It should suck the teat down a little into the syringe. Wetting the end of the tube or using a little lubricant may enhance the seal. Give Mom a minute to let milk down. Now you can pull the plunger out a little more. When the milk starts, it will stream into the syringe. Empty the syringe and start again. You can even pump the plunger a little while it's on the teat and increase the flow.

If Mom is sore, I don't imagine this feels great, but at least you're not pinching or pulling the teats. Our girl, who is not an easy animal to manage (200 lbs. plus), began to relax and stop screaming as her pressure was relieved. And it's much easier to save the milk if you want it. Definitely worth trying.

### Alpaca Health & Welfare

- [Integrated Parasite Control](#)
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# Alpaca Health & Welfare

New England is the perfect place to raise alpacas in part because farmers here in New England want to share their know how with new breeders.

As you read these "secrets" and shortcuts, you will be amazed at the Yankee ingenuity and common sense approach that has been the hallmark of the New England farming community since Colonial times.

Click a section to the right. Each page contains many time- and money-saving tips!

## Related Pages

- [Integrated Parasite Control](#)
- [FAMACHA Scoring](#)
- [Why and How To Do Sheep & Goat Fecal Egg Counts](#)
- [Alpaca Husbandry](#)
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### [4-H \*\*Alpaca\*\*/Llama Page | Cooperative Extension](#)

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AnSci - **Alpaca** and Llama Show Association Youth Judging Manual. A manual describing how to judge **Alpaca** and Llama's. AnSci - **Alpaca** and Llama Show ...  
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### [Purdue University 4-H Llamas and \*\*Alpacas\*\* Manual - Resource ...](#)

Purdue University 4-H Llamas and **Alpacas** Manual. A manual developed by Purdue on the 4-H Llama and **Alpaca** project. Purdue University 4-H Llamas and ...  
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### [AnSci - \*\*Alpaca\*\* Record Book - Resource - UNH Cooperative Extension](#)

A record book designed to help youth in the 4-H **Alpaca** Project. AnSci - **Alpaca** Record Book. A record book designed to help youth in the 4-H **Alpaca** Project.  
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### [AnSci - \*\*Alpaca\*\* and Llama Show Association Handbook - Resource ...](#)

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### 4-H Alpaca Project Record Book

File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat

The full name of my **alpaca** as listed on its registration papers ... Record everything you used or did to train your **alpaca**, how you prepared your **alpaca** for shows.

[extension.unh.edu/resources/files/resource002382\\_rep3481.pdf](https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/resource002382_rep3481.pdf)

### Introduction to the NH 4-H Alpaca and Llama Project - Resource ...

Introduction to the NH 4-H **Alpaca** and Llama Project. Introduction to the NH 4-H **Alpaca** and Llama Project. 2-page fact sheet. Introduction to the NH 4-H **Alpaca** ...

[https://extension.unh.edu/.../Introduction\\_to\\_the\\_NH\\_4-H\\_Alpaca\\_and\\_Llama\\_Project](https://extension.unh.edu/.../Introduction_to_the_NH_4-H_Alpaca_and_Llama_Project)

### Novice Quiz Bowl Event

File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat

**Alpacas** have coexisted with humankind for thousands of years. They are ... The life span of an **alpaca** is about 20 years and gestation is 11.5 months (350 days) ...

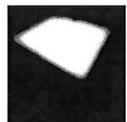
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[extension.unh.edu/resources/files/resource000083\\_rep85.pdf](https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/resource000083_rep85.pdf)



### ALSA HANDBOOK

File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat

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[https://extension.unh.edu/resources/.../Resource002386\\_Rep3485.pdf](https://extension.unh.edu/resources/.../Resource002386_Rep3485.pdf)

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## 4-H Alpaca/Llama Page

### New Hampshire 4-H Alpaca and Llama Project

The New Hampshire 4-H Alpaca and Llama Project focuses on two types of camelids: alpacas and llamas. Camelids are members of the camel family. The average llama is roughly twice the size of the average alpaca. There are differences in the body and head also, especially the shape of the ears. While the alpaca has been carefully bred for over 6,000 years as a luxury fiber-producing animal, the llama was bred as a pack animal. Its purpose has traditionally been to carry packs in mountainous terrain. The llama has coarse guard hair which protects its fine, inner coat of fleece from the chafing of the pack on its back. The alpaca and llama project focuses on fiber production, performance, showmanship, pack training, and other areas. You don't have to have your own alpaca or llama to participate in the New Hampshire 4-H Alpaca and Llama Project. You can lease an animal and/or participate in a variety of the activities and events that the New Hampshire 4-H Alpaca and Llama Project has to offer. Check out the links below for more information.



New to the Alpaca and Llama Project? Check out the NH 4-H Alpaca and Llama Project Fact Sheet for basic information and check out any of these links below! Also, check out the Purdue University 4-H Llama and Alpaca Manual for basic information about the Llama and Alpaca Project. To see if others in your county are participating in the Alpaca and Llama Project Area, contact your county 4-H office by clicking here.

\*NEW\* 4hOnline Animal Intent to Show Instructions \*NEW\*

### Events

#### State Events

New Hampshire Sheep and Wool Festival

#### Regional Events

Eastern States Exposition Spinning Bee - September, West Springfield, MA

Eastern States Exposition Fiber Contest - September, West Springfield, MA

ESE Fiber Festival November, West Springfield, MA

#### National Events

North American Llama and Alpaca Show- Nov, Louisville, KY

### Show Information

Exhibitor Responsibilities

Alpaca and Llama Show Association Handbook

#### State Shows

NH Fairs Page and 4-H Entry Information for NH Fairs

#### Regional Shows

Northeast Alpaca Exposition - May, Syracuse, NY

Eastern States Exposition Llama and Alpaca Show - September, West Springfield, MA

Topsfield Fair Alpaca Exhibition and Show - October, Topsfield, MA

North American Alpaca Show - April, West Springfield, MA

National All American Youth Jamboree - June, Indianapolis, IN

North American Llama and Alpaca Show - November, Louisville, KY

### Forms and Policies

\* **If you did not enroll in the 4-H Program through 4-H Online** you are required to attach a Youth Medical Care and Treatment form and the Youth Code of Conduct/Permission Release form to your 4-H Animal Intent to Show form.

\* **If you did not complete the medical form through 4-H Online** you will need to attach a Youth Medical Care and Treatment form to your 4-H Animal Intent to Show form.

**You may complete 4hOnline Animal Enrollment instead of a paper intent to show form.** See link for instructions.

Online Animal Enrollment Instructions \*NEW\* to use online Intent to Show

Animal Intent to Show Form (formerly known as "4-H Animal Approval Form")

Animal Lease Record Form

Emergency Action Plan

New Hampshire 4-H Policy Manual

NH 4-H Animal Project Records

NH 4-H Animal Requirements & Deadlines

NH 4-H Enrollment Form

NH 4-H Policy on Rabies Vaccinations

NH 4-H Replacement Animal Policy

NH 4-H Youth Code of Conduct

NH 4-H Youth Medical Care & Treatment

NH Animal Health Regulations

What is a 4-H Lease and How do I set one up?

## Project Records

4-H Alpaca Record Keeping Book

NH 4-H Animal Project Records

## Project Resources

4-H Alpaca Record Keeping Book

Alpaca and Llama Show Association Youth Programs

Alpaca and Llama Show Association Youth Judging Manual

NH 4-H Alpaca and Llama Project Fact Sheet

Purdue University 4-H Llama and Alpaca Manual

UNH CE Fact Sheets: Barn Safety Be Aware of Drug Residues, Handling Large Farm Animals, Large Animal Transportation, Trailer Safety Checklist, Housing and Space Guidelines for Livestock

Washington State University Llama Project Manual

Washington State University 4-H Leader's Manual for Llama Activities

What's the Difference Between a Llama and an Alpaca?

## Related Associations

Alpaca Llama Show Association

Alpaca Registry Inc.

New England Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association

Northeast Llamas and Alpaca Breeders

## Committee Information

Curriculum Committee Overview

Curriculum Committee Member Service Description

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Conservation Client Gateway, a new public website, allows you to request technical and financial assistance, review and sign conservation plans, request and track payments for your completed contract items and much more.

Client Gateway is a new public website that allows clients secure ability to request conservation technical and financial assistance from the USDA.

Through Client Gateway, clients can also access their:

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- financial assistance contract payments,
- and much more.

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- APPLY FOR CONSERVATION PROGRAM FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
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www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway

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Upper Black Creek Watershed Second Sign-Up

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Video : Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative



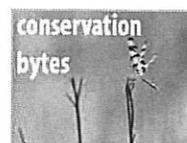
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**Web Applications & Tools**

A list of Web-based resources for access to natural resource data collected by NRCS.

**En Español**

Información de NRCS en español.

**NRCS State Websites**

Find local program and technical information on our NRCS state websites.

**Limited English Proficiency**

Information on Limited English Proficiency.

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## Alpaca Health - Meningeal Worm

Literature Review With Implications for Alpaca Owners

Jill McElderry-Maxwell, Bag End Suri Alpacas of Maine, LLC, March, 2010

[Introduction](#)  
[Life Cycle](#)  
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[Symptoms](#)  
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### MENINGEAL WORM: AN INTRODUCTION

Meningeal worm (*Parelaphostrongylus tenuis*) is a parasite of special concern for many alpaca farmers. Carried by white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and intermediate slug and snail hosts, "m-worm", as it is commonly known, lives and reproduces in the deer. Although the deer are generally not adversely affected by the parasite, any other animal ingesting an infected slug or snail is usually killed by the activity of the parasite as it travels through the nervous system.

Preventing infection in our alpacas is a critical part of husbandry for alpaca breeders anywhere white-tailed deer are prevalent, as prevention using monthly injections of ivermectins is easy – but a cure is often impossible. Even when an infected animal's life can be saved, lingering neurological deficits are common.

### LIFE CYCLE

*Parelaphostrongylus tenuis* is a common parasite of white-tailed deer (WTD) and white-tailed deer only. Even other cervids such as mule deer, fallow deer, moose and elk are aberrant hosts for the parasite, which has been a factor affecting the reintroduction of elk to the east coast [Bender, et al., 2005; Larkin et al., 2003]. The expansion of meningeal worm into historic caribou ranges is considered to be the primary factor causing the decline of caribou in areas where ample suitable habitat remains [Anderson, 1971].

The life cycle of the parasite has been long studied and is generally well known [Anderson, 1972]: WTD harbor adult worms usually only a breeding pair, in the subdural spaces of the brain. The adult parasites either lay eggs on the dura matter of the brain or deposit them directly into the circulatory system. In the first case, young larvae hatch and penetrate small blood vessels of the brain in which they are carried by the bloodstream into capillaries within the lungs. Those eggs laid directly in the circulatory system are caught up in the capillary structure of the lungs, where the larvae hatch. The L1 larvae in the lung migrate into the bronchioles and are coughed up, or else they migrate directly into the throat. In both cases they are swallowed by the deer, pass into the digestive system and ultimately out in the feces.

WTD feces have a mucous coating that many species of slugs and snails find appetizing, and the meningeal worm larvae are found in this coating. As slugs and snails pass over the infected deer feces feeding, the L1 larvae burrow into the feet of the gastropods. Although some species of aquatic snails have been experimentally infected with m-worm, no infected snails have been collected from aquatic environments. It is hypothesized that the mucous coating containing the larvae breaks down too rapidly in water for the larvae to be easily found and consumed by mollusks, as the larvae are washed away when the coating dissolves [Anderson, 1972; Lankester and Anderson, 1968].

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## Alpacas: Dollars And Sense

*Alpacas are considered by many ranchers to be a lucrative and relatively easy livestock investment. Find out if the alpaca and its benefits are compatible with your farm.*

0 SHARES



PHOTO: iStock/Thinkstock



by [Patricia Barraza Vos](http://www.hobbyfarms.com/author/patricia-barraza-vos/)  
(<http://www.hobbyfarms.com/author/patricia-barraza-vos/>)

February 18, 2009

Just a few decades ago there were but a handful of farmers and ranchers who had introduced alpacas in the United States.

Now, thanks to a number of factors, alpacas are considered a lucrative and relatively easy livestock investment, with their numbers climbing to about 50,000 in this country.

Still, this is a drop in the bucket when compared to about 3.5 million alpacas in South America, their continent of origin.

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What does this mean for the alpaca in North America and its breeders and owners? How long can the growth of the alpaca market in this country be sustained? And dollars and cents aside, just what makes the alpaca so lovable?

## Alpaca History

Alpacas are modified ruminants, part of the camelid family, which also includes llamas and camels. They are smaller than their cousins, standing at about 36 inches at the withers and weighing in at about 150 to 200 pounds.

While their smaller size and quizzical faces do in fact give them a high cuteness factor, whether or not they are huggable is debatable.

Many ads and websites for alpacas feature the ubiquitous picture of an adorable child hugging an adorable alpaca, but at the end of the day these are livestock creatures.

You may find the occasional alpaca that enjoys his hugs, but for the most part, they're happy enough to mingle amongst their own and come to humans for treats and a good scratch.

Regardless of its predisposition toward being hugged, the alpaca is significantly easier to handle than most other livestock. They are smaller and therefore less intimidating than horses or cattle, don't challenge fences the way goats do, and are hardy and easy keepers. Alpacas are certainly "user-friendly" livestock, which helps explain both their attractiveness as a livestock investment and their reputation for huggability.

Alpaca history accounts for their resilient nature ... Alpacas are originally from South America where the Incas bred them for thousands of years the Incas' lives were intertwined with those of alpacas, using the animals for fleece, food and transportation. During the Spanish colonization of South America, alpaca and llama numbers dwindled and the Inca and their livestock fled mostly to the higher, harsher climates of the Andes Mountains. As a result, the alpacas became extremely efficient grazers.

In 1984, several alpacas were imported to the United States from Bolivia, Chile and Peru. But in 1998 the U.S.-based Alpaca Registry Inc. was closed to any newly imported animals in an effort to improve the breed in this country. As word spread about the ease of care and keep of alpacas, the number of breeders and enthusiasts has grown.

## Care and Feeding

Just how easy are alpacas to keep? Here are some basics:

Alpacas are extremely efficient grazers so they require little pasture and, with their padded feet, they are very easy on the land. Many breeders supplement alpaca diets with orchard grass hay and add a small ration of pelleted grain.

Those who keep alpacas for breeding and for fleece production (as opposed to just pasture pets) may want to adopt a more specialized feeding program. For instance, pregnant females may require more nutrition than what is readily available in pasture and hay, so an owner may consider additional nutritional supplements. Free-choice mineral blocks can also be provided. And for the very particular breeder, agricultural extension agents can be brought in to test the nutritional value of available pasture and hay.

The cost of feed is a small factor to consider. Alpacas only eat 1 to 1.5 percent of their body weight per day. In terms



of cost, this works out to about 50 cents per alpaca per day.



Providing fresh water is critical for all animals. For alpaca owners in northern climates this means making sure water containers haven't frozen. Automatic heated waterers help keep water chores to a minimum.

As with all livestock, alpacas warrant careful attention to their health. Annual vaccinations and regular deworming are necessary. Routine procedures, such as deworming, can be handled by an owner, which goes a long way toward saving on veterinary bills. In fact, finding a vet knowledgeable in alpaca care becomes one of the first chores of an alpaca owner. While more vets are becoming acquainted with the breed, their numbers are still few and far between.

The largest concern for alpaca breeders is healthcare for pregnant females and, of course, their babies, known as crias. Some owners prefer to send their pregnant females out to farms that have more experience at birthing, but in reality alpaca births tend to be fairly easy. Most likely due to the fact that they hail from a cold climate, alpaca births occur during the day and are typically uncomplicated. Regardless, a responsible alpaca owner will want to be present at the birth should any trouble occur. Amongst the many skills new owners should study up on before venturing into breeding is how to deal with troubled births.

Teeth and toenails must be routinely trimmed. Again, most owners will choose to do this on their own once receiving instruction from a competent teacher. Many new alpaca owners will find that the breeder they buy their stock from can be a tremendous source of knowledge when it comes to care and maintenance information.

## Fencing and Housing

Since alpacas rarely challenge fencing, the strength and type of fence should be more about keeping predators out than keeping alpacas in. After a recent hurricane, breeder Chris Lewis of Alpaca Advantage in Delaplane, Va., discovered that a few trees had come down in his paddocks, crushing fence lines and leaving wide-open gaps toward the roads. His alpacas, however, thought better of leaving their safe enclosure and none had made any attempt at escape.



Predators are a big concern to alpaca owners, so in order to keep coyotes, feral dogs and others out, many breeders use no-climb fencing in combination with standard oak-board fencing.

A three-sided shelter is generally sufficient for alpacas. Since they hail from cold, windy mountainous areas and are well equipped for such weather. Heat and humidity are of more concern for alpaca owners. Protection from the sun is critical; when heat and humidity combine, additional measures must be taken. Some farms incorporate fans and misting systems, others just spray down their herds with water.



Shelters need to be large enough or number enough to accommodate all members of the herd. Since females need to be kept separate from the males (both studs and geldings), separate sheds need to be provided, or, if barns are used, they must be sectioned off.

## Alpaca Herds

There are two types of alpacas—Huacaya and Suri. Ninety percent of alpacas in this country (and worldwide) are Huacaya. They are distinguishable from each other mainly by their fleece: The Huacaya fleece is woolly and the Suri fleece falls like pencil-thin dreadlocks.

The majority of alpaca owners and breeders have less than 10 animals, so in this case herd management is straightforward. Females are kept separate from the males, and females with young cria at their sides should be further isolated (though, as herd animals they should never be kept entirely separate from the rest of the herd as this will cause more stress than necessary).

The herd typically shares a communal manure pile making alpaca easy to clean up after. Their manure is rich and small, similar to sheep manure, and is welcome to gardeners even before composting.

## Alpaca Economics

The first question potential alpaca owners usually ask is whether or not money can be made from alpacas. If a buyer forms a plan, sets goals, properly prepares his or her farm (or an agistment arrangement with another farm), cares for the herd and carefully plans breeding, then the answer is almost a definite "yes." Presently there is still strong demand for well-bred breeding stock, and this is keeping prices high.

When Amy Makrosky, current president of the Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association (AOBA) bought her first four alpacas eight years ago, she asked herself the question "What if prices fall?" Since she had already fallen in love with the creatures, her bottom line was, "if the market drops out, I'll still have them and I'll still love them." Fortunately for Makrosky, the market has not fallen and for now, shows no sign of abating. Her original herd of four has since grown to about 100, which she keeps on her farm in Texas.

Still, at a minimum of about \$12,000 for a female alpaca, many buyers will want more from their investment than a lovely, but expensive pet. The question of whether a return can be made on an investment in alpacas lies not only in the apparent strength of the current market, or on one's ability to care for livestock, but also how adept and inclined one is at marketing. Presently, approximately 85 percent of alpaca breeders are making their income through the sale of breeding livestock alone, with no concern for the sale of fleece. This means ranchers must become proficient at the art of selling and marketing their livestock.

According to Chris Lewis, while nothing is guaranteed, an investor in alpacas will meet with financial success if he or she makes an educated effort. "The biggest mistake new owners of alpacas make is spending all their investment dollars on breeding stock alone," says Lewis. It might be wiser, he suggests, if an investor, for example, has \$60,000 to spend, devote \$40,000 to breeding stock, \$10,000 on marketing and sales, and set aside the final \$10,000 for breeding fees, unexpected vet bills and other miscellany.

The question of profitability also concerns what is considered "well-bred stock." Since there are no set guidelines for conformation, what presently wins in the show-ring is what's the nicest looking animal on any given day in the ring. In other words, breeders have been breeding for "pretty," with a focus on color and some popular conformation points.

Many in the alpaca industry, however, are starting to breed with an eye toward what they see as the only true future for alpacas: fleece production. Some breeders are now more carefully considering the very technical aspects of fleece quality and incorporating breeding practices to improve it.

Alpaca fleece, a highly coveted luxurious product, is five times warmer than sheep's wool and seven times stronger. In South America, alpacas are bred specifically for their fleece. Here in the United States, however, there are so few alpacas that, up until now, no economic incentive existed to market fleece beyond the niche markets of hand-spinners and weavers. The entire national clip (all the fleece collected in a year in this country) is now about 50 tons, compared to Peru's 4,000 tons. A commercial mill could process that amount in three days. As a result, there is little motivation for American large mills geared for sheep's wool to modify in any way to accommodate this new product.

Two things need to happen to change the minds of American large mill owners. The number of alpacas in the United States has to increase dramatically (which it is on track for) and breeders must start to breed their stock with an eye toward fleece quality.

The Alpaca Fiber Cooperative of North America (AFCNA) was established in 1998 to assist its members in collecting, processing and distributing their alpaca fiber. While it's not yet running at a profit, the Cooperative hopes that increased awareness of its goals, along with increased numbers of alpaca breeders interested in working the fiber angle of their industry, will mean profits for all involved soon enough.

Fiber aside, money can certainly be made in the market for breeding livestock since that market is far from saturated and enjoys a strong demand. As of this writing, a well-bred female can easily fetch \$20,000 and a superb herd-sire was recently auctioned for a record-breaking \$250,000!

A number of factors assure future market growth. As of 1998, imported alpacas can no longer be registered with the Alpaca Registry Inc. While ostensibly one can still import alpacas, concerns over foot-and-mouth disease have, for the most part, closed off the United States from new imports. Also, investors in the alpaca market are strongly encouraged to work strictly with registered animals only. All of this, combined with the fact that alpacas have just one cria per year, means that the growth rate is set.

## Entering the Market

A typical entry into the business of alpaca breeding goes something like this: A breeder new to the industry prepares his farm (fencing, shelters, feed, et cetera) and purchases his herd of alpacas—usually concentrating his initial investment on bred females. Let's say he invests \$90,000 on five females. Each bred female produces a cria within a year. About half of the offspring will be female, half males. Some of the female offspring will be sold, the rest kept to augment the breeding herd. In five years, the starter herd of five bred females can grow to 30 animals, now leaving the breeder with \$500,000 (potential) worth in alpacas. Even before an actual return is realized, alpaca owners enjoy several tax advantages, from depreciation to real-estate tax reductions.

Those unable to pony up the initial cash needed to make such an investment can take advantage of financing options provided by many alpaca breeding farms. Another option for those unable to make a large initial outlay of cash is to join an alpaca investing syndicate where members each invest a certain percentage toward the purchase and care of alpacas.

Whichever entry route is taken, the potential significant return on investment within four or five years is part of what is driving this market. But many individuals seem to be attracted to alpacas for lifestyle advantages as well. With such small land requirements (depending on geography and pasture management, between five and 10 alpacas can be kept per acre), and ease of care and breeding, many novice and hobby farmers see alpacas as an easy gateway into livestock ranching.

Lewis believes that many individuals, including a significant number of retirees, in the post-September 11 world have been drawn to a more simplified rural lifestyle. And alpacas are an easy and welcome fit with that "back to the country" inclination. "After September 11th, there was a big surge of interest [in alpacas]," notes Lewis. "People were leaning toward a different set of values, a more old-fashioned way of doing things, where security and quality of life are more important."

As Lewis points out, alpacas blend in nicely with those new inclinations. "They're just a pleasure to be around."



## Where to Find Alpacas

Alpaca breeders and owners are very plugged in to 21st century technologies and communication methods.

Finding out more about alpacas on the Internet is fun and easy. Additionally, many sites have search functions that make it simple to find alpaca breeders near you. Alpaca industry insiders often encourage farm visits for those even just considering investing in alpacas.

Most likely because they know any time spent with alpacas is ultimately an addicting experience.

- **Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association (AOBA):** [www.alpacainfo.com](http://www.alpacainfo.com) (<http://www.alpacainfo.com/>). On AOBA's official website you can locate breeders, check out the extensive calendar of events, order print and video information on alpacas (and their breeding and care), or just peruse their pages for loads of information on getting started with alpacas.
- **Alpaca Registry Inc. (ARI):** [www.alpacaregistry.net](http://www.alpacaregistry.net) (<http://www.alpacaregistry.net/>). This database housing the genealogy, blood typing and ownership records of alpacas in North America contains information regarding membership requirements and benefits. Since its inception in late 1988, the Registry has mandated blood typing as a requisite for registration and accepts only offspring of registered alpacas that qualify by blood typing.
- **Alpaca Nation** ([www.alpacanation.com](http://www.alpacanation.com) (<http://www.alpacanation.com/>)) is an independent website where individual alpaca farms can advertise their services and livestock sales. The site is well organized, easy to navigate and a great place to start "virtual" alpaca shopping.
- **I Love Alpacas.com:** [www.ilovealpacas.com](http://www.ilovealpacas.com) (<http://www.ilovealpacas.com/>). You've seen the commercials, now enjoy the site. This ad campaign was financed and created by a group of about 100 alpaca breeders. Many of these breeders had valuable marketing and communications experience from their previous professional careers and this combined knowledge is now being applied to their alpaca marketing efforts. The site, while containing some basic introductory information on the alpaca industry, is fundamentally designed to direct potential investors to alpaca farms near them.

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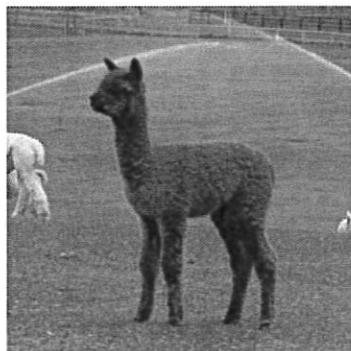
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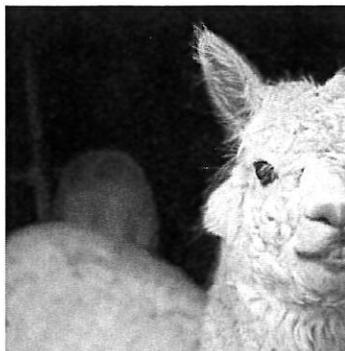
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