

TWIN PINES ALPACAS FARM REPORT



this issue

Annual Fibre Harvest **P.1**

De-bunking Fibre Myths **P.2**

After the Harvest **P.3**

In This Issue

In this issue, we will chat about fibre production and harvest, fibre characteristics, and how we prepare our fibre for processing in our mill.

Did you know?

Alpaca fibre grows perpendicular to their bodies, which gives them a 'fluffy' appearance. Naturally lanolin free and hypoallergenic, alpaca fibre grows on average 3 to 6" per year. Shearing is their annual 'haircut'.

Did you know?

On our farm, we will shear approximately 60 alpaca over a period of 10 hours. Of course, it takes a team of shearers, volunteers, family & friends to keep things running smoothly – but it is a good feeling to see what we have accomplished at the end of the day.

Annual Fibre Harvest



Welcome Back – This is our 2nd edition of the Twin Pines Alpacas Farm Report!

Thanks for taking the time to pick up a copy of our second edition (Spring/Summer) farm report to learn more about who we are, what we do and why we do it!

Twin Pines Alpacas Farm & Fibre Mill is owned and operated by Dr Joe Muise and Barb Bunker. Our farm is located in the beautiful rolling hills of Northumberland County on County Road 10 just south of Millbrook, Ontario. Since 2010, we have been building on our desire to raise alpaca and learn more about these wonderful animals. In 2018, we installed a complete textile mill on site to allow us to have greater quality and

and control over the final fibre products we produce. In this edition of our farm report, we will focus on a few topics near and dear to our hearts including our annual fibre harvest, fibre quality & characteristics; and post harvest activities. We will be sure to de-bunk a few myths about alpaca fibre along the way!

As we mentioned in our first report, we farm Huacaya (pronounced Wuh-kai-ya) Alpaca for the sole purpose of fibre production. As of this spring we have approximately 60 huacaya alpaca in our herd, and with our fingers crossed, we will welcome a few more baby alpaca ~ called Cria (pronounced Kree-ya) this summer.

Preparations for an annual fibre harvest is actually the end result of a year long process. To produce high quality fibre, herd genetics do play an important role in the total farm fibre yield each year. Annual breeding plans based on information from histograms and/or prior sort-grade-class activities during fibre harvests support informed decision making to maximize future yields. In addition, a focus on herd health by providing safe shelter, high quality feed, mineral/grain supplements and medical care are equally important.

Shearing Alpaca

Alpaca fleece is sheared in order based on location (body part). The shearer starts with the blanket (back and sides of the alpaca) which provides the longer and finer fibres well suited for yarn. Next, the neck fibre is clipped. Neck fibre can offer similar fineness; although fibres can be shorter in length.



The last areas of shearing include the belly, apron and legs; which, may have a large presence of guard hairs – therefore this fibre is less desirable for production. On the legs, fibre is quite coarse and therefore is primarily trimmed vs completely sheared in order to continue to protect the legs. After one final check for any 'tufts' missed during shearing to tidy up their look ~ viola it is done!

Did you know?

An average alpaca produces about 4-6 pounds of fleece per year; and takes approximately 7-10 minutes to shear one alpaca from start to finish!



Is the process of shearing sheep the same for shearing alpacas?

Actually, the process of shearing is different between alpacas and sheep. People who shear alpaca have been trained to clip the primary fleece off in one piece in order to avoid second cuts, which can devalue and damage the final fleece product. Ernesto (pictured above) – likes getting his 'haircut' – it feels good as the warm weather approaches & he gets ready for summer grazing!

Shearing

At our farm, we use experienced alpaca shearers and a team of volunteers. However, there is much to do in advance of the big day! Preparations for shearing starts with a full clean out of our barn facilities to remove residual dirt and vegetation. Next, each alpaca is treated to a 'spa day' – where each alpaca receives a gentle blow out of their fleece for dirt and vegetation using leaf blowers. In the end, the alpacas are clean & happy, and we are covered in dirt!

The next day, shearing begins! The order we shear is girls' first from light to dark fleece ~ then boys from light to dark fleece. We are also assessing each fleece to plan how we want to use it after the harvest. In all, it takes us about 10 hours to shear our entire herd.



De-bunking Fibre Myths

Not all fibre is the same, and sometimes the myths may not always be true. This is true when comparing alpaca fibre to sheep wool. Let's de-bunk a few myths – shall we?

Myth #1: All fibre is picky.

Every fibre has an external structure made up of 'scales'. The scales of a fibre will vary in number, size and height; and, this is where the difference between sheep and alpaca fibre begins. To use an analogy, think of scales of a fish. You can see many scales, of a certain size but they are often 'flat' on the surface – therefore they can feel smooth. In coarse or average sheep wool, the scales can often feel 'picky', but why? It is because there are more scales, they are generally larger, and often tend to 'curve outwards' – like a hook' from the fibre shaft. Scales, which curve outwards and have more height, will feel 'picky' to the touch.

Alpaca fibres have fewer scales

which are longer & smoother making the fibre soft to touch, adds luster (shine), and therefore not 'picky'.

Myth #2: All fibre will felt

The number and height of scales on fibre will determine the ability to felt. Felting does not shrink the fibre, but rather makes the scales lock together, resulting in a more dense end product. Not all sheep wool will felt as it depends on the breed. However, Huacaya Alpaca fibre can be used for felting purposes.

Myth #3: Only Alpaca have guard hairs

The role of guard hair in alpaca and sheep is to protect the fine underdown coat. Alpaca guard hairs are hollow straight fibres of varying length and grade. In sheep guard hairs are referred to as kemp fibres, which may be hollow, short with a chalky white appearance. Guard hairs do not hold twist, and make not take dye well which makes them not desirable in yarn products.



*Natural
Fibre
Naturally
Soft*

After the harvest

Sort, Grade and Class

To sort, grade and class fibre is a process which helps a fibre producer determine the best use for the fibre and improve product quality.

Sorting is the process by which fibre is evaluated and put into uniform groups (batches) by type (i.e. huacaya alpaca, suri), length (short (1.5-3") or long (3-5")), colour (white beige, fawn, brown, true black, grey), and grade (fine to course).

Grading is the process by which the fibre batch is given an overall grade. Fibre is evaluated using a six grade micron scale (from ultrafine to coarse). Each grade has a range of approximately 3 microns: Ultrafine (Grade 1 < 20 microns), SuperFine (Grade 2, 20 - 22.9 microns), Fine (Grade 3, 23 - 25.9 microns), Medium (Grade 4, 26 - 28.9 microns), Intermediate (Grade 5, 29 - 32 microns) and Robust (Grade 6, 32.1 - 35.0 microns).

The final grade assigned is based on the largest proportion of micron present in the batch.

Classing is the process by which the sorted and graded fibre is further identified for a specific end purpose. For example, a finer grade of fibre may be used for a baby blanket which soft and is used next to the skin; whereas, a coarse graded fibre may be used for batting for quilts where the final product is not used directly against the skin. However, a uniform Grade 4 fibre can be processed together and still make a lovely yarn!

The benefit of sorting, grading

& classing fleece is quite simply ~ a consistent high quality end product. For a fibre producer these benefits include:

- ✓ An annual farm report of total fibre production by grade, colour and length.
- ✓ An inventory of individual animal record to inform future breeding decisions.
- ✓ An opportunity to improve usability of fibre into desired end products with greater yields with less waste.

Watch for our next edition farm report, coming this fall, where we will talk about how we process fibre in our mill!



The boys checking out the girls who were just sheared!

Twin Pines Alpacas Farm & Fibre Mill 10374 County Road 10, Millbrook, Ontario

Did you know?

At Twin Pines Alpacas we sort, grade and class our alpaca fibre prior to processing. Huacaya Alpaca fibre properties are similar to wool in that it has luster, elasticity and crimp. After shearing, fibre is assessed for colour, luster, crimp, staple length and micron size in order to batch like fibres together prior to processing. A product made of uniform fleece of similar length, grade and characteristics will produce a better product, than one from mixed length and grade.

Find Us on Social Media

Keep current by visiting our website for events and announcements. We will be opening our farm store this spring!

www.twinpinesalpacas.ca

Remember we like making new friends! Follow and Like Us on Facebook to see what we are up to! Our Facebook page is Twin Pines Alpacas Farm & Fibre Mill

Want more info email us: info@twinpinesalpacas.ca