

AUSTRALIAN ALPACA INDUSTRY OVERVIEW



Alpacas are a global industry

- Native to South America, alpacas have been farmed for their fleece, leather, and meat for 7,000 years.
- Today, they are now being farmed in increasing numbers in countries including Canada, UK, Europe, New Zealand and South Africa.
- Australia imported its first alpacas from South America in 1988 and alpaca farming here is now a flourishing rural industry. Australia has some of the world's largest breeding studs, with a growing number of breeders in varied regions running commercially focused herds in excess of 3,000 alpacas.
- Peru has the world's largest alpaca population with previous estimates of approximately 2.8 million animals, while Australia has one of the largest registered breeding herds in the world with more than 180,000 animals.
- Countries throughout Asia with previously small alpaca numbers are now looking to grow their herd sizes. China has entered the global alpaca industry at scale, working with Australian breeders to structure their industry, relying on comprehensive Australian genetics in their foundation herds.
- Australian alpaca are currently exported to destinations including Canada, China, Middle East, Thailand, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Negotiations regarding market access into New Zealand, the UK and Europe continue.

Common Terms within the Australian Alpaca Industry

- There are two breeds of alpaca throughout the world. Huacaya (pronounced Hue-kai-yah) and Suri (pronounced Suu-ree). Both with their own luxurious benefits for fibre production.
- The term "Cria" (pronounced Cre-ya) is used to describe the juvenile or baby alpaca.
- References in Australia for male and female alpaca are simplistic, but sometimes referred to as Machos and Hembras being the Spanish equivalent.
- Wethers are the castrated males, often used as herd protectors.

Australia's Role in the Growing Global Market

- Australia is a world leader in quality fleece production and our expertise is widely sought. Our position at the forefront of breed development and advanced fleece styles is the result of extensive genetic research and the development of sophisticated breeding technologies.
- Domestic and export markets exist for fleece and stud animals. Fleece is sold through a number of specialist supply chains and sale has been facilitated by expert classing of alpaca fleece.
- Australian alpaca is valued for its soft, luxurious fleece, sharing the top end of the international market with finest cashmere and superfine merino in the world of high quality natural fibres.
- Australia continues to make advances in the global industry. Australia developed the first Code of Practice for classing alpaca fibre and other alpaca farming countries around the world are now looking at the example.

The Alpaca Contribution to Modern Agriculture

- Whilst the alpaca is an ancient livestock, it is very well suited to 21st century agriculture.
- Alpaca are low impact, sturdy, and easy to handle livestock. Like sheep, they are shorn annually.
- They are farmed for their fleece, leather, meat, and Australia also breeds many for their highly sought after genetics. Demand for alpaca fleece is growing as fashion consumers around the world seek high quality natural fibre garments.
- Alpaca are valued in Australian farming conditions as they are efficient high value food converters, low water users, have soft padded feet rather than hooves, and are gentle non-tugging grazers. They can be grazed at higher density than many other comparable livestock.
- Research and development is continuing into the value of alpaca in human medical treatments such as snakebite and certain cancers.

Alpaca Fibre Production in Australia

- Alpaca fibre comes in a range of amazing natural colours, more than 16 definable colours in total. There is little or no need for chemical dyes or treatments. Several successful Australian manufacturers are leading innovators in the field of alpaca fibre products.
- Alpaca fibre is soft, light, warm and comfortable when worn next to the skin and is classified as a luxury fibre.
- Alpaca is often sought after by consumers who consider it to have hypoallergenic qualities.
- Alpaca garments and homewares – quilts, pillows, blankets and even carpet – achieve premium prices due to their superior quality. The products have an exquisite luxury feel with a modern, environmentally friendly appeal.
- Alpacas produce a modest fibre clip of between 2.0 and 4.0kg with an average fibre diameter of 23.5 micron. Most of the fibre with commercial value is contained in the saddle and an appropriately skirted saddle will yield up to 1.5 to 2.5kg of fleece.
- Alpaca fleece prices depend on several quality factors including fineness, colour and suitability for processing, plus the quantity of consistent fleece available for commercial production.
- Australian alpaca fleece is high in quality and achieves premiums in the marketplace. High quality low micron fleece in white and light fawn are in very high demand but there are markets for all micron ranges for different purposes.

Meat Production in the Australian Alpaca Industry

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

Technology in the Alpaca Industry

- Australia is a world leader in embryo transfer (ET), which has been a highly significant advance in producing some of the world's finest quality stud animals and fleece.
- The Australian alpaca industry has built on 200 years of gold standard merino sheep breeding knowledge enabling it to quickly forge an expert international reputation for quality Australian alpaca fibre.
- Australia's International Alpaca Register (IAR) is an online animal registry utilizing a bespoke database called eAlpaca and incorporates a sophisticated breeding predictor. The quality and detail of this Register further enhances the value of Australian alpacas on the world market.
- Early Australian research has successfully demonstrated that immunoglobulin molecules in an alpaca's bloodstream have potential in the production of therapeutic antibodies such as snake anti-venoms. These findings are the result of research funded by the Australian Alpaca Association and Agri Futures Australia, and could lead to a new, high value niche market for alpaca derived medical products.

Youth in the Alpaca Industry

- The Australian Alpaca Association has a well-established Youth program to create a structure and forum for young breeders interested in alpaca.
- Leading breeders, judges and camelid veterinary experts are contributing to the youth organisation.
- Young Paraders event for Showmanship and Stockmanship are held at shows around the country.
- A combination of show events, workshops and youth camps give Alpaca Youth members opportunities to further develop their husbandry and handling skills and knowledge in judging fleece and animal conformation.
- 'All About Alpacas' is a program designed for schools to provide support material suited for most curriculum based education.

The Future for Australian Alpacas

- The development of improved fleece harvesting and processing techniques will assist in meeting the demand for high quality Australian fleece from both breeds, Huacaya and Suri alpacas.
- The Australian alpaca industry is now pursuing further dramatic volume growth to the national herd, to achieve the critical mass for the competitive economies of scale necessary to move the market forward to the next stage.
- Advances in Suri fibre production and processing will continue to impact. Suri is known for its lustre and ability to blend beautifully with silk to produce high quality woven materials.
- Australia's emerging meat and hide industry will offer greater opportunities to existing alpaca farmers and new entries into the industry and represents a move into fully commercial, whole animal farming.
- A continuing supply of wethered alpacas will serve the sheep industry as herd guards - fearlessly warding off foxes to protect newborn lambs.
- A growing worldwide consumer interest in alpaca products has generated demand for more producers of high fashion and high-quality homewares, and an increase in industries such as the high quality manufacturing of alpaca carpets and rugs.
- Australian retailers continue to support the industry with an increasing supply of Australian grown product available.

The Australian Alpaca Association

- The Australian Alpaca Association (AAA) is the peak industry body for the alpaca industry in Australia.
- The AAA was formed in 1990 and now runs one of the most internationally advanced alpaca registers of bloodlines and breeding predictors to generate continual improvement in herd quality and worldwide reputation.
- The AAA provides tools, information and support to bring owners together for the future of alpaca farming as a fully commercial industry.
- For more information – www.alpaca.asn.au

ENDS.