

# Alpaca: Media Fact Sheet

## *General Information*

- Two breeds: huacaya (wa ky uh) and suri (soo ree)
- Huacaya: sheep like fleece that carries crimp and has staple definition
- Suri: silky, soft handling dense locking fleece that moves freely – locks form close to the skin and twist uniformly to the ends
- Average height: 90-95cm at the withers (shoulder area) when fully grown
- Average weight ( $\pm 10$ kg): adults: males 85kg, females 70kg
- Lifespan – 18-24 years
- Induced (trigger) ovulators: receptive females can be mated at any time of year
- Gestation period: 11.5 months – twinning rare
- Birthing usually occurs during daylight hours (7am-3pm)
- Newborns are called cria (cree-ah) and average 6.5kg at birth
- Lifestyle income: small herds (with as few as 2 breeding females) can produce reasonable returns; values have held in NZ over the past 20 years; mid to long term returns can be achieved; animals can be insured.
- Native to South America – farmed in the Andean mountains, 3500m plus above sea level
- Domesticated over 6000 years ago
- Introduced into NZ in 1987
- Related to the llama, guanaco and vicuna – and from the same family as the camel

## *Features*

- Curious and intelligent animals.
- Easily halter trained and mustered

- Placid nature – gentle around children
- Travel well in float or van
- Hardy, low maintenance livestock that can adapt to a wide range of conditions
- Average stocking rate is 4-5 alpacas per acre (but can vary depending on pasture)
- Opportunist browsers. Eat grasses, clovers, legumes; oaten, lucerne and meadow hay are good supplements
- Digestive system: functional pseudo ruminants – only 3 stomachs compared with four in classical ruminants. Alpacas are efficient feed converters – extracting maximum nutritional value from their diet. They do not require high levels of supplementary feed
- Do not suffer from foot-rot or fly-strike
- Alpacas have soft padded feet that are gentle on pastures and delicate soils
- Communal dung piles reduce internal parasite problems

### ***Husbandry***

- Annual vaccinations and shearing required
- Toe nail clipping – this may be a quarterly or annual task, depending on the animal and paddock conditions.
- Drenching is done on an “as needed” basis
- AD&E injections to cria and animals under 2 years of age

### ***Fleece***

- Classified as a luxury fibre by textile industries
- A protein fibre (wool-like) – commonly referred to as “alpaca”
- 22 natural colours ranging from white through to black
- Average fleece quantity per animal: un-skirted 2.5-3kg (some fully grown males/wethers produce 5kg or more)

- Is as soft as cashmere
- Stronger, lighter and warmer than wool (merino)
- Hypoallergenic - little to no lanolin, and the absence of barb-like cuticles, makes alpaca a natural alternative product for people with sensitive skin.
- Has a softer handle than merino – alpaca can feel up to 12 micron softer than the equivalent micron in merino (Wang, Wang & Liu, 2003, RIRDC publication, Australian Government)
- Considered “Fibre of the Gods” by South American Indians (Incas)

***Statistics (as of July, 2008)***

- NZ has approximately 15,000 animals; 74% of these animals are registered.
- 87% of registered alpacas are huacaya, 13% are suri.
- Colour stats for registered alpacas: Huacaya – 29% white, 30% fawn, 20% brown, 6% grey and 15% black; Suri – 37% white, 31% fawn, 18% brown, 3% grey and 11% black.
- Median number of alpacas per owner is 9
- Approximately 700 registered AANZ members

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