



**STARTING
AN
ALPACA
BUSINESS**

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INTRODUCTION

The following is an ongoing summary on how we started an ALPACA business and the changes it made to our lives. To make sure there are no misunderstandings nor misleading assumptions, neither my husband (Dale) nor I (Debbie) have had any experience in farming or raising any herd animal, no longer ALPACAS. We have no degrees in agriculture or claim to be an expert in the ALPACA business. We wanted to provide a synopsis of our ALPACA business endeavor from:

- Seeing an ALPACA for the first time

- Visiting different ALPACA farms

- Selling our home to buying a farmette with more acreage

- **Buying supplies and materials (fencing)**

- **Making a decision on what ALPACAS to buy**

- **Raising of the herd**

- **Attending shows & seminars**

- **Selling our ALPACAS to taking the full advantage of the IRS tax write-off's and more**

This venture started with Dale agreeing to support me in this opportunity as long as I agreed to raise ALPACAS as a business - which requires selling any of the herd and the fleece to recoup our expenditures. The Internet has provided numerous articles that provide a wealth of information on ALPACAS. The one thing missing was an in-depth first hand experience guide that answered or explained many of the questions that continue to emerge in

starting an ALPACA business. So we hope this will help anyone interested in starting an ALPACA business or any business.

BACKGROUND:

I worked for a trucking company for over thirty-years and would have to work another fourteen years to reach full retirement. Dale has worked at his current job for thirty years and can retire in approximately five years. So when we decided to go into the ALPACA business, we reached the decision that I would take an early retirement to manage the farm in anticipation that in five years the ALPACA business would help offset Dale's retirement. This would require many changes to what we considered a comfortable living. Making adjustments to live on one regular paycheck instead of two, changing our health insurance, limiting our spending by being more conservative and learning the ALPACA business were now our challenges.

MAKING THE DECISION:

One of the first decisions was to sell our home we built in 1990 with five private acres bordering the Appalachian Trail and purchase a mini farm of fifteen acres with quality outbuildings. We were quite comfortable where we were and had less than three years of payments. So wherever we bought, we wanted to be sure that after the purchase we would still be able to buy quality-bred ALPACAS. We also felt that the farms we had looked into buying were all in need of repairs, both inside and out, so this had to be considered in our budget. Dale made it very clear that his goal was, “retirement in five years” and told me to get busy building my ALPACA business.

POSSIBLE FARMS

We went to look at (5) possible farmettes for sale.

- One was 20 acres of woods with something sitting on it resembling a house. It was horrible and we couldn't wait to get away from there.**

- One was 8 acres that we had looked at many years ago, so we didn't need to go in --- we just had to drive by to be sure it wasn't a different farm on the market. Too old and too many repairs to be made and bad location (although it did have some fencing and a paddock).**

- One was advertised under "farms" but when we went to look at it, it was just the homestead house sitting on less than 1 acre of ground. Totally not interested.**

- One we had heard about and were advised to drive by to look – upon looking, we realized it was way out of price-range! 67 acres, white plastic fencing, two barns, two in ground pools, and a beautiful home --- all for just \$1.9 Million Dollars! It would really be a perfect place to raise Alpacas; we just cannot afford something like that. Too bad.
- The farm we chose was 15 acres with a barn and outbuildings. The house is older (70's) but has great potential.

SEEING ONE FOR THE FIRST TIME:

Our anticipation to see our first alpaca was high; our expectations were unknown. The farm was about 40 miles and the herd size ranged between 55-65. As we pulled into the long driveway, we stopped to stare at the field only to be stared back at by several ALPACAS – they were beautiful.

We introduced ourselves to the awaiting proprietor. It was a warm welcome and off to the barn we went. As we approached, Dale and I looked at each other in amazement. We just couldn't believe how wonderful and fast they stole our hearts. We were hooked. I wanted my own alpacas more now than ever.

Our host grabbed an alpaca by the neck and it froze. We didn't have a clue what to expect. Once she had control, we approached and felt the fleece. We just smiled at each other – all the Internet research and pictures can't prepare you for that moment – the touch of the softest fleece you've

ever felt of a real ALPACA. It was an experience we talked about for weeks and only fueled the fire burning inside us to have our own herd and farm.

VISITING DIFFERENT FARMS:

PENNSYLVANIA

The one thing that all the ALPACA farms had in common was their hospitality. The people we met were extremely helpful in answering our questions and showing us their herd. We made a commitment to visit at least four farms (some of them more than once). Although we asked many of the same questions to the different proprietor's, we received the same helpful answers. This made us more comfortable about our final decision to go into the ALPACA business.

However, the common denominator was the dollar amount to be spent because of the direct impact on the quality of your herd and eventually the sale of your ALPACAS. Here again, you only get what you pay for. If you purchase pet quality ALPACAS - that is what you end up with, pet quality ALPACAS. There is nothing wrong with this approach as long as you tailor your goal to selling ALPACAS as pets. In

our case, we plan on buying quality-bred ALPACAS with hopes of selling quality alpacas.

MARYLAND

We visited two ALPACA farms in Maryland.

The first one was an 8-acre farm under construction. They had about 25 ALPACAS (Suri and Huacaya). They even had a large camel in the pasture with the females. They also kept several llamas, donkeys and horses in the same corrals. We looked at several, but really found nothing of interest for us to purchase. The camel was an extremely gentle male, but I found rather intimidating following us around while we tried to look at their alpacas. The owner's wife appeared to be intimidated by the camel also, because she didn't take us into the pasture once her husband left the area. We inquired on several young females in the upper pasture, and were not shown because of the camel being in there. We learned that although the camel was unique and certainly of the same family, it did not seem to fair well with us to have them together. As we walked toward the ALPACA

herd in the main field, the herd ran from us. We asked the owner if it was us or the camel, and he replied, 'probably both.'

Onto Farm #2.

As we arrived at the second farm, the owner had just gotten into her cart and was heading up the pasture to see the new cria that had been born within the hour. This was really exciting for us, as we had never seen a newly born cria. I rode around in the cart with her as we looked for the placenta to make sure it had been passed from the mother. Dale and the male owner took the mother and baby to the corral to separate them (to bond) from the rest of the herd. All of the other females were extremely curious of the new baby and all had to come over as if to welcome it to their herd. It was a happy day at their farm.

While we were there, one of the male **ALPACAS** sounded the herd alarm and all the females ran together away from the area, and two of the females surrounded the mother and

baby on the outside of their corral as if standing guard. This was the first time we had heard the alarm cry.

She then took me in to see her spinning wheel and demonstrated by spinning some yarn for us. I am very much interested in spinning my own alpaca yarn, so this was very exciting for me.

Dale had suggested to me about raising chickens on our farm, and lo and behold, this farm had the perfect chicken-raising setup. They had bought a portable chicken hatchery that had its own sunroom, feeding area, hatchery and removable tarp for waste. All you had to do was move it (on it's own wheels) every few days (8) feet to give them new scratch area. They told us they bought it from a guy @ www.henspa.com. Dale thinks he can build one of these himself for our farm, so it appears as though we might be getting chickens as well.

We saw several females we are particularly interested in, as well as one incredible stud. We will probably be contacting them as soon as we're ready to buy.

Even though it was a long day (we left early in the morning) to visit these two farms, we feel the trip very worthwhile, and, as always, we again learned from our venture.

We had to stop at a store and purchase Dale a shirt because he had the cria's blood on him from when he carried her to the corral and we had to stop for dinner on the way home. All in all, it was a great visit as we made new friends.

FREDERICK, MD FAIR

During our visits to the different ALPACA farms in Maryland, we were invited to visit the Frederick Fair (which included an alpaca show). We were told that the show would include judging the alpacas for their quality (conformation, fleece, etc.) and ribbons would be awarded for the obstacle course. We had been advised that the obstacle course brings out the best and the worst as far as embarrassment to the handler. Being our first show, we didn't know quite what to expect, but were definitely planning on being there.

We estimated 100–125 ALPACAS registered, owned by many different alpaca farms. All were extremely proud of their entries, some more than others after the obstacle course debacle. Nevertheless, the ALPACAS provided great entertainment!

It was interesting to see the different age group of handlers get an opportunity to show the different ALPACAS. Some of the handlers had to look up to see the head of their ALPACA but showed no fear of handling their ALPACA. We had our grandson, Daniel, with us who had never seen an ALPACA, other than in pictures, and like us, his first alpaca show. Daniel is 10 years old and is excited about our interest in buying a farm and raising alpacas. He is already planning to show "his" ALPACA and wants to name the first cria born on our farm. We share his excitement and can't wait until we are managing our own farm and herd.

The judging was first-rate and offered constructive guidance to the handlers to enhance future showings of their ALPACAS. Our selections were mirrored with the judges in most cases or very close.

Attending the Frederick Fair provided us with a better understanding of the alpaca business, showing the

close community among the owners. The 150-mile round trip and the time spent at the show were well worth attending.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE DIFFERENT FARMS:

It was interesting visiting the different farms and seeing how the different buildings, paddocks, feeding areas and herds were being managed. One thing we noticed most was that herd size dictated the amount of handling each alpaca received. Of course there is a trade off – the smaller the herd, the smaller selection a buyer has.

Another thing we noticed that made shopping for ALPACAS more pleasurable was a bench in the paddocks and pastures. This provided us the opportunity to sit while continuing to observe and ask questions about the different ALPACAS in the herd. With this being a new venture for us, the ALPACAS all started to look a bit alike and it became confusing when trying to recall the many different names. At one farm, the owner opted to use his digital camera while we handled and viewed his ALPACAS. He forwarded the images via the Internet with detailed information about each animal. I thought this was a good idea and a great business

strategy. It sure makes it nice to sit down and view the possible options he had to offer from home.

PRICE SHOPPING:

When you see so many ALPACAS and everyone has the best breed and bargain for the dollar, it becomes interesting but a bit overwhelming. Being new in the business, we seem a bit beleaguered by the fact that most owner's rattle off a stud's name and a list of ribbons they have won as though we knew what they were saying. We are trying to make sense of buying breeder females and the seller throwing in a pet male. At first this seem to be a good deal, but is it a good deal or are the sellers trying to reduce the non-productive herd members? We have been told that pets are good for their fleece, and a companion for a breeder if gelded. In a conversation we were told by a breeder that they couldn't keep pets in stock, they were always sold out. If this is the case, we are wondering why the non-quality females weren't bred with the non-quality males simply to provide more pets. If you keep ALPACA pets, why not benefit by selling the fleece and their

offspring as a pet? What happens to the non-quality herd members? Is there a demand or not?

To keep in focus with our goal, our intention is to buy quality breeders and breed to the best of our ability and finances.

How do you really know what constitutes a good breeder to buy? We have seen some great looking ALPACAS with a price that seem to indicate there must be a problem – they were too inexpensive.

We question rather to buy our herd at one breeder or several breeders. Our thoughts are some of the breeders offer free rebreeding as long as we own the female. The larger farms can afford the better stock in our opinion. We believe this provides a better opportunity to continue to improve our herd using their top quality studs. At this point in time, our budget doesn't allow us to pay the breeding fees by the top alpaca champions.

Another area that is vague is buying for color. There doesn't seem to be an exact science on breeding for color, two blacks end up with a white and gray, etc. Yet, when we asked for prices on a certain gray ALPACA, we are told that it's a gray and had to have more money because it produces great crias that win shows - it's offspring has produced champions. How do you really know?

SELECTING THE RIGHT ALPACA TO BUY:

The Internet also provides a lot of information on judging alpacas at shows and what the judges look for and expect. This information is worth reading and understanding when making your final decision to buy ALPACAS. We had been offered several deals on buying one or packages, but to reach our goal of obtaining quality ALPACAS we carefully examined what each farm had to offer. They are all cute and sometimes you want to take them all home, but remember, not all alpacas are breeding quality, simply pet quality. Since we want a quality herd, the price will limit the size of our starting herd, therefore our decision is very important and becoming very difficult.

OUR GOAL:

Our goal is to reach our herd size of about twenty quality ALPACAS in five years. We believe that a herd this size is about as large as we can handle and still keep personal touch. Another goal is to have the herd as friendly as possible. But being new in the business, time will tell.

I also plan to spin the fleece and hopefully establish a buyer for the end product. My daughter, Kim, and I visited a business in East Berlin, PA that sells spinning wheels, looms, etc. The spinning wheels range from a few hundred dollars to thousands. This is a time when you only get what you pay for, so I recommend you call or visit anyone who has hands-on experience in spinning.

THE NAME GAME:

Kim thought of our business name, Alpacaholic Acres. It was gratifying that we finally had a name that worked for us. Coming up with a name turned out to be more of a challenge than one would think. It took months! We can finally move on to getting more essential things:

- Website
- Tax #
- Business card
- Advertising plan

Tim, Kim's husband, jumped right on getting us registered with the Internet name and development of the web page. Meanwhile I requested a PA tax number the following day. (Form SS-4 found on: www.irs.gov)

INTERNET ADDRESS:

Our Internet address is www.alpacaholic-acres.com and is currently under construction by Tim. There are several service providers that will add your address to their web page for a fee. You need to consider what your budget will allow. Getting started can be expensive and until we fully understand the do's and don'ts, we plan to be a bit conservative.

BUILDING A WEB PAGE:

Now that we have a business name, Tim started building our web site. There is a cost of \$30.00 to \$50.00 to download the front page from the Internet. This is the page that appears when you log onto a site. Then there are the search tools to provide availability to other site links. Until you get the web developed and working, you can spend a few hundred dollars plus approx. \$100.00 per year for the server provider. Of course you are responsible for keeping your website updated. In our case, we plan on Tim maintaining the site.

NEXT STEP

I made the big step and resigned from where I worked. It was something I was looking forward to and haven't regretted to this day. This gives me the opportunity to focus on the move and starting the alpaca business.

With settlement over, we had fence to install, a barn to fix, stalls to add and lots of repairs on the house to be made. The cost of fencing and installing the fence has run over budget fast, even with us doing all the labor. We installed white 5' high chain link fence in the front of the fields and beside and behind the house. The remainder of the outside fence is 5' high horse fence. The inside fenced area is a combination of 3' and 4' high chain link fence.

We finally are ready to buy our alpacas!

This turned out to be harder than what we had expected. Our past visits had really paid off, due to knowing where we felt comfortable dealing with the different farms. We wanted a quality herd to start with, yet we wanted to stay within our budget.

BUYING

It was decision time – where to buy and which ones to buy. One of the most important factors we observed from our visits was the selection of ALPACAS we would have purchased if ready at that time. It was encouraging that the ALPACAS we wanted were sold and gone. This was good and supported our hopes that alpacas do sell, yet, discouraging that those we selected were gone.

Our final selection came down from two of the larger farms. Both had met our expectations of what an ALPACA farm should have to offer – experience and knowledge of the business.

We visited one farm on a Saturday and the second on Sunday. We wanted the ALPACA and the pricing fresh in our minds, along with the digital pictures Kim had taken.

We made our decision and opted for the ones on the second farm. One of the principle factors was the breeding program. We received free breeding as long as we owned

the animal. Both farms had blue ribbon winning males, so the stud service offered was equal.

Our selection was two pregnant females, two young females, one blue ribbon male (all Huacaya) and one pet quality Suri male – who is absolutely adorable!

To make things a bit more challenging, we went to look at a newborn llama. Needless to say, we bought both – mother and son – and plan to use them as guard llamas.

We were researching the Internet, thinking we needed to buy a gray or black female to make our color selection complete. After some discussion and many phone calls, we went to a huge alpaca farm in VA. We purchased another female – brown/gray. We all fell in love with her immediately and it didn't matter what color she was!

At this time, we have seven (7) ALPACAS and two (2) llamas. If things go as planned, two of our females will be ready to breed in early spring and another later this fall.

Our venture has become a reality --- at last !

FOOD:

Agway was the preferred food supplier by those farms we visited. They offer the best quality pellets for the best price, keeping in mind the needs of your herd – pregnant, males, etc.

We were told that it takes about 1 bale of hay per week per ALPACA during the winter months for feed. In our area, hay sells from \$2.00 to \$3.50 per bale. One of our friend's farms given us a price break for the limited amount of hay bales we needed in the past. We also plan to co-op with the local farmer to farm the acreage we don't need for the alpacas at this time. This is a win-win for both of us. We are excited about feeding our herd off of our own land.

OUTSIDE SHELTERS:

ALPACAS require a place to stay out of the sun. Heat is more of a danger to the herd than cold. We visited farms with fans, water misters, sheds, to trees for shade. Along with our barn (with ceiling fans installed) we plan to use a run-in shed (3-sided with opening in the front) with a large overhang and build accordingly to the size of the herd. The cold in PA doesn't seem to be a major factor for them. The PA farms we visited left the doors open providing the alpacas the choice of being in or out.

DESIGNING A PADDOCK:

There are websites that recommend several designs that provide valuable information. It's important to be able to close off sections so the grass has time to produce thus providing fresh grazing grass. We plan to use a long shoot about 12 feet wide down the middle with side pastures with gates. This seems to be the best design for our acreage and still limit the distance to transport fresh water. It also seems like the best method to control the alpacas when its time to shear, medical treatment, etc. ALPACAS can be elusive when you want to catch them at times.

AN UPDATE:

The past two months have been interesting with many new challenges.

- ▶▶ We had the hay in our field baled.
We split the total number of hay bales with the farmer and ended up with 235 bales. (We only had a few acres ready to bale.) Stacking the hay in our barn loft was hard work; we now have great respect for farmers.
- ▶▶ Confirming one of our females was pregnant.
This was a first for us – drawing blood from the underside of an alpaca tail. It was good for us that Kim works in a lab with small animals and was used to drawing blood. It's cost-effective to draw the sample yourself and send it to a laboratory rather than have the veterinarian come to your farm. We are now experienced!

- ▶▶ **We have pre-registered for our first alpaca show near Philadelphia this fall. This, of course, has caused us to purchase a stall carpet, get a hay bag with our farm name printed on it and have a sign painted to hang up at our stall. We are entering two of our younger females in the halter class for Huacaya – one white, one brown. We have worked with them every night (walking with them on their halters) and getting them “fine-trimmed” – we’re hoping to get a ribbon!**

- ▶▶ **We have our first “Open Barn” planned for later this summer – so things are still rather hectic around here – but we wanted all of our friends and family to be able to come and visit.**

OPEN BARN:

Our first “Open Barn” is over and all went well. We had great weather and plenty of food and refreshments.

Our alpacas and llamas were the perfect hosts – with both the children and adults. They allowed our guests to walk up to them and pet them without being restrained. The Frisbee food dishes were also a hit and drew a continuous crowd of alpacas and friends.

In our opinion, having an Open Barn answered many of the questions from our friends and neighbors. Many uncertainties were put to rest by our neighbors learning our alpacas were friendly and weren't going to be a nuisance.

Although preparing for the Open Barn required the entire family's help, it turned out to be well worth all the effort, not to mention the free publicity it has brought to our farm.

HORSE TRAILER

We located a nice size thoroughbred two-horse trailer in the local paper for sale. Although it is from 1979, it had been kept under a shelter. There had been routine maintenance performed and the floorboards had recently been replaced.

Dale repacked the wheel bearings, replaced the grease seals and bought a new wiring plug for our truck. We plan to use the trailer next month for our first show.

Many of the trailers we had looked at were more than we wanted to spend at this time or simply needed more work than we were willing to put into a trailer. As luck would have it, the trailer we purchased was less than five miles from our farm.

SEPA

We were told about a new alpaca show called the Southeastern Pennsylvania Alpaca Show and Sale hosted by the Illusion Ranch. The location was two hours from our ranch so we registered two of our yearling females in the shorn halter class and made plans to attend.

As this was our first show as participants, we quickly made a list of items we felt we needed for the weekend. We had our vet check our animals and received the veterinarian's health certificate required to show our girls. You must be sure the health certificate is dated so many days prior to the show – something we almost overlooked.

We set our expectations at having a good time and trying to learn as much as possible from the more experienced farms. Kim worked with Talullah and Dale worked with Kristina Marie (pictures on our sales list), training them for

the show. Our nerves were running high with anticipation as the days grew closer. It seemed that some days the girls just didn't want to cooperate.

The day arrived to transport our two girls to the show. Dale got up early, cleaned Kristina's dirty knees and turned her loose in our small pasture while hooking up the trailer we had just purchased a few weeks earlier. Her solid white fleece just gleamed in the morning sun; she looked proud and like a little lady. By the time Dale pulled the trailer to the barn, Kristina had managed to locate a small area where I had placed some peat moss and took it upon herself to roll about a few times, just to be sure to cover any white spots she may have missed in the first roll or so. She was now black and brown – what a real mess! We were upset to say the least, but knew what to do – turn her loose in the main field.

We had taken the advise from a more experienced farm and had a truckload of cracker dust stones dumped in the main

field. This does an amazing job at keeping the alpacas clean. They roll and play “king of the hill” on the stone pile; it’s the biggest hit in the field. As we packed and were ready to leave, we watched Kristina roll in the stones and hoped for the best. It worked, when we were ready to load her, she was kushed down on top of the stones and looked bright white again.

When we arrived, registration had just opened. With our papers in hand, Robin and Lori from Illusion Ranch met us with anticipation of helping in anyway they could. *(I need to mention that Robin and Lori’s effort throughout the entire show and behind the scene to organize the show is to be commended.)* We are already planning to attend next year.

We were asked to bring our alpacas into the show ring to be checked for color, papers, etc. Although we registered both our girls in the shorn halter class, due to inexperience on our part, Kristina’s fleece measured 2 inches plus in some areas and a little less than 2 inches in other areas – placing

her in the unshorn class. We didn't have a problem with where they were placing her; we just wanted her in the show to see how she would do – a measuring stick for us. Talullah was fine and was placed in the shorn brown halter class – females under 2 years old.

We were now registered and heading for our stall!

We set up our stall by placing a mesh rug on the sod, hung up our new hay feeder (with our farm name on it), filled the water bucket, hung our new ranch sign (made by Signs by Dave), set out our chairs and table, put out our business cards and hid the pooper-scooper and pan. We were ready.

It was interesting to see the different displays the various farms set up. Some really put a lot of effort into it. If there is one thing we will change for next year, it would be to get two stalls instead of one. The animals had plenty of room, but with our chairs and table sitting outside the stall, you find yourself sitting in the walkway instead of being able to

relax or talk in peace --- only a major inconvenience this year; we were having fun!

We had watched many alpacas being judged and it was finally time for Kim's class to step into the ring. I don't know who was more nervous – Kim, Tim, Dale or me. Off Kim went with Talullah, her Dad standing ringside, Tim on the video camera and me trying to sit and observe on the bleachers – we were all petrified. The judge checked for conformation in the walk, the body, the bite and fleece. Although it took about 15-20 minutes per class, it seemed an eternity. When the judging was done, Kim and Talullah won our first **Blue Ribbon**. Blue ribbon winners get to have their picture taken for free (we would have gotten a picture of them together regardless of the cost). We were all so excited and everyone was so nice.

That evening at the hotel, one of our friends asked if Kim had an interest in showing one of his Suri's the following day. She passed; I think she had enough excitement for the

weekend. The next morning, to our surprise, our son-in-law, Tim, asked if our friend was serious about Kim showing his animal – he said he was going to ask if he could show it for him. It was agreed upon that Tim would show the Suri. It won a blue ribbon and although it wasn't our animal, we were happy for our friend and Tim. It was a good learning experience.

Late Sunday morning, Dale and Kristina headed for the ring. It was all we could do to once again sit in the stands. The judging took forever in the white unshorn class, with the judge calling for Kristina and another competitor to bring their alpacas together to compare the fleece. This was almost more than I could stand at this point. In the end we were awarded a **red second place ribbon**. We were very excited. We were happy with the overall judging and extremely proud of Talullah and Kristina Marie. It had been a great weekend for Alpacaholic Acres.

The show provided valuable information to the alpaca industry by having a continuous flow of spectators in attendance. We met new friends just starting in the business and gained valuable information by listening and asking questions to the more experienced breeders. A great weekend spent with a lot of new friends - we can't wait until next year!

LATEST UPDATE – JANUARY 2004

It's been a few months since the last update and many things have happened. The costs of starting our alpaca farm are continuing to escalate. At this point, our budgeted funds are about exhausted due to all those "hidden costs."

Ongoing expenses include:

- Fencing**
- Gates**
- Feed**
- Shelter**
- Healthcare**
- Membership Fees**
- Show**

WEBSITE

If you plan to advertise your farm and have a business, a website is a must. Without a website, you wouldn't be reading this journey. Although this journey is intended to assist new owners, websites link you to a vast wealth of alpaca knowledge and events. Our son-in-law built and maintains our website and saved us the cost of contracting to a web designer. We have instant updates/deletions as needed and it's been beneficial to us. We can't thank him enough for his time and the constant changes we all seem to want "now".

VETERINARY and MEDICAL

Make sure you locate a vet willing to come to your farm. You don't want to be looking for a vet in a "time of need." We called about twenty until we located a veterinarian willing to make farm calls. The difference between losing and saving an animal can be minutes. We also pay for the time traveled to and from our farm, so we have 1 hour and 30 minutes on the invoice before the vet even looks at an alpaca. So on regular visits, we have our animals ready in a holding area to see the doctor.

A quality scale is a must.

- ▶ We found this out on the very first visit from our vet. To administer the proper dosage for shots, worm medicine, health care, etc., you need to know the correct weight of the alpaca. It's difficult to judge the weight of your alpaca in full fleece compared to one that has been shorn.

- ▶ Our scale is a *Befour* and cost about \$700.00 so we're hoping it lasts us a long time.
- ▶ We use the scale monthly – weighing our animals the first of each month when we examine them for problems, administer worming medicine, trim toenails, etc. We actually all enjoy doing this because it gets the entire family involved and being with the herd.

Medical Kit / Cria Kit

You should have a cria kit on hand for newborns. This provides you the essential items at the time of need. It's important to be familiar with how to dispense and understand what must be done for those unexpected emergencies. Useful Llama Items sells a nice kit for \$129.00. The Medical Kit sells for about \$165.00.

- ▶ I want to mention an incident that happened on our farm to amplify the importance of having a cria kit available. Kim was going to halter and walk one of our junior herdsires, Jersey Lightning, who

normally is very gentle. It was dark and we had the security lights on to light up the field. Kim's attempt to halter Jersey wasn't going well – he didn't want his face to be touched. Kim's hand felt wet and when she looked, it was covered with blood. Kim yelled for us and we brought Jersey into the barn. He was bleeding from his mouth with a steady drip. With our Medicine Kit on hand, we were able to have sterilized pads to clean the blood and look for the problem. It turned out that Jersey had just lost a baby tooth! The wet, cold compress had stopped the bleeding and all was well.

Alpaca Books

There is a selection of books to assist you on learning the “do's and “don'ts” for alpacas. Some of the books will cost you a hundreds of dollars – but well worth every penny. Our scare with Jersey's tooth was put to rest because we had the books; the information explained that this was normal and would grow a replacement.

- ▶ [The Complete Alpaca Book](#)
Eric Hoffman w/ contributing authors

- ▶ *Caring for Llamas and Alpacas*
Clare Hoffman, DVM, Ingrid Asmus
- ▶ *Alpaca Field Manual*
C. Norman Evans, D.V.M.
- ▶ *Llama and Alpaca Neonatal Care*
Bradford B. Smith, DVM, PhD
Karen I. Timm, DVM, PhD
Patrick O. Long, DVM
- ▶ *Medicine and Surgery of South American Camelids*
Murray E. Fowler, DVM

Blood Tests

There are many reasons you will need to draw blood from your alpacas. In some cases, your Vet will have to draw the blood and request the necessary tests. Kim draws the

blood for our alpacas (we're getting our ROI from her degree in Biology) for pregnancy tests and registering new crias with the ARI. There is a great saving by learning to draw your own blood samples.

BREEDING

We have two breedings currently going on at this time:

- ▶ Windsome Barnaby (our junior herdsire) is breeding two females from a farm in NY. We wanted to prove Barnaby and offered a free breeding from which we received many offers. Barnaby has figured out his role in the breeding program and we are eagerly awaiting the “spit-off” to begin.

- ▶ We purchased Talullah from Double-O-Good Alpacas in VA in August of 2003. When we purchased her, we split the cost with our daughter, Kim and her husband, Tim. Talullah is top-shelf with her rare taupe color, unbelievable crimp and conformation. We had planned on showing her this Spring at the upcoming shows, but have changed our plans due to Double-O-

Good purchasing “Peruvian Justice” – son of Accoyo Peruvian Augusto and offering limited breedings with him. This should produce excellent bloodlines and produce a magnificent cria for us. We are very excited about this opportunity and can’t wait to see Talullah’s cria.

SUPPLIES

Halters

When we started, we had just a few halters but soon realized that each halter had to be adjusted a little different for the proper fit on each alpaca. They **MUST** fit properly on the nose – we found the 3-way adjustable ones work best. We recommend having a halter for each alpaca and we purchased a few halters for the show ring only because we learned that most shows only allow black halters and leads – nothing fancy.

Food Dishes

Our herd has a pecking order where one of our females wants every dish first or it becomes a pushing/spitting contest. Each alpaca has their own food dish. It seems important to them and food dishes are cheap.

Water Buckets

We didn't budget to have underground waterlines run into our barn with automatic, year-round water dispensers with heaters. With the cold winters in PA, water buckets freeze, so we have purchased the buckets with the heaters built into the bottom – about \$30.00 each. We fill the buckets daily (sometimes twice/day). There doesn't seem to be any pattern why some days they drink more than others --- it keeps us guessing!

Hay

Not being farmers by trade, we quickly learned that not all hays are alike, nor are the prices. In our area, a 40-pound bale of hay costs between \$2.50 and \$4.50. We now have three different kinds of hay to feed our herd – Timothy Hay, Orchard Grass Hay, and Timothy Hay with Alfalfa. They seem to like them all – with whatever you have just put out as being their favorite!

The “Beans”

One other topic I want to mention is trying to keep those “beans” cleaned up. No one told us about the chore of

trying to keep the frozen beans cleaned up in the winter! They either become part of the frozen ground or 'fling' to parts unknown when you're trying to clean them up!

We were so proud of our alpacas because they never dropped their beans in our barn all summer. We had manageable, designated bean piles that seemed to agree with both our alpacas and us. Then came those cold, snowy, windy nights and the beans just started dropping in the barn. Once the "boys" sensed the "girls" doing it, they followed and seemed to try to outdo them! It's a real barn mess that we were not used to.

We since have limited their "area" in the barn and it seems to have helped. We can't wait until Spring!

ORGANIZATIONS and SHOWS

Organizations

If you're going to own alpacas, you will want to join and support different organizations. We joined:

- ▶ AOBA
- ▶ PAOBA
- ▶ MaPACA
- ▶ ARI

For our location, these seemed to be the most accommodating. In addition, you will receive valuable information about the alpaca business and discounts at their shows/seminars.

Shows

We are planning to attend four shows this year:

- ▶ **Virginia Classic in March**
- ▶ **MaPACA in April**
- ▶ **PAOBA in May**
- ▶ **SEPA in September**

The VA Classic is held March 13-14, 2004 in Lexington, VA. This will be our first trip to this well-known “Classic” as it is familiarly known. It has continued to grow in popularity each year – from 45 exhibitors and 188 animals in 1994, to just over 500 animals, 140 exhibitors representing 19 states in 2003. We have been advised to take warm clothing as the stalls are located outside and the show ring is not heated. Early March in VA can be unpredictable, but we are looking forward to being there. Registration is \$75.00 per animal and \$50.00 per stall.

The cost to enter varies from show to show. When you add on travel time, hotel rooms, registration, etc., it adds up quickly. The gratification of showing our animals, getting

away for a weekend with other alpaca owners and the overall enjoyment prevails over cost.

We also use the shows to assess the quality of our alpacas against the competition. In a show with over 500 entries, each farm has brought their quality alpacas and are all expecting to win. This makes it that much better for those who do take home a ribbon.

TEXTILE MARKETING

Deb and Kim have taken up spinning after completing a spinning class at *Mannings*. We purchased an Ashford Traveller, an Ashford Niddy Noddy and a Louet Carder.

Mannings is about 8 miles from our farm and well known in the alpaca and fleece industry. If you take a class at *Mannings*, please stop by to visit us.

We plan to offer a limited amount of clothing products made from our own alpacas. We have a person, Kitty, who has an unbelievable talent for crocheting. She has won many blue ribbons in competitions. We plan to let interested parties select the color and crimp they want directly from our alpacas. Deb (Kim) will spin the fleece, Kitty will measure the individual and then crochet a personalized item especially for you. We will offer several

other garments that don't require special sizing. We are very happy with our plan and have several inquiries already on placing orders. We plan to have these items on our website within the next month.

FINAL CHAPTER

Well, the first year just blew by. The lawn is turning green, the alpacas are grazing and the last of the snow piles have melted. We have rolled the fields, planted grass seed, have more grass seed on order and have finished construction of our third shelter.

As a family, we have all grown in working together on how we plan to manage our breeding program and herd. The warmer weather has increased farm visits and we have a few prospects for our first-born cria due any day now, and another one due in May. We have Talullah being bred at Double 'O' Good to "Peruvian Justice" and Kristina Marie ready to be bred to "ELK Triple Crown." Both males are blue ribbon winners at major shows. We are pleased with our breeding program and the extraordinary males adding famous lineage to our herd.

We have met many new friends through our business. We have gained experience from attending the shows; it was wonderful seeing all the different alpacas, gaining insight on the judging and meeting new alpaca owners.

The alpacas have changed our lives; we have no regrets starting this business. They become part of your life from which you gain so much more than you give.

We are Addicted!

Please give us a call (or email us) to set up a farm visit.

Dale, Debbie, Kim and Tim