

## **Focus Your Beginning**

*By Lezley Golding – Stevley Park Suri's*

So, you have looked into those big brown almond shaped eyes and been smitten by the alpaca. You just have to have one. Then you think to yourself, I know nothing about these inquisitive but curious creatures. What do I do next ?

This is the point where you need to start asking yourself many questions and commence defining your focus and perhaps developing a business plan. In all aspects of life having a focus and goals is most important. The alpaca industry is well established in Australia so now it is relatively easy for the new breeder entering the industry to have their questions answered and be able to 'Focus Your Beginning'.

The following is a guide only and hopefully will help you decide how you can move forward in the alpaca industry with this exquisite animal.

### **Ask Yourself A List Of Questions – Here Are Some To Start With -**

- Do I own or have access to acreage ?
- How much land is required ?
- Do I want to agist my animals ?
- Do I want a couple of non-breeding pets to mow the grass ?
- Do I want alpacas as herd protectors ?
- Do I want breeding females ?
- Do I prefer Huacaya or Suri ?
- Do I want white, or a specific colour ?
- What do I want to do with the fleece ?



Huacaya Alpaca

### **Visit Established Breeders**

Ok, so lets assume you have asked yourself these and many more questions. This has prompted you to visit established breeders and allowed you to get some hands on experience with alpaca's, i.e. husbandry [toe nails, injections, halter training]. Shearing time is a good time to handle animals and learn a lot about fleece. New breeders will find most established alpaca breeders will make themselves available to help and advise.

## **Find A Mentor**

At this stage it is good to find yourself a mentor that you are comfortable with. Be guided by them, remember they have been in the industry longer than you and have a wealth of knowledge ready to impart.

## **Become A Member Of The Australian Alpaca Association [AAA]**

By joining the AAA, you will gain access to a wealth of knowledge. Become involved in your Local Region. Check out their website and attend as many workshops as possible. Go to shows, meet other breeders, look at and get your hands on other animals.



Suri Alpacas

## **Suri or Huacaya?**

You will find that after you have done some research, spend time with both Suri and Huacaya, you will have decided on a preference. Suri's are the rarer fleece type of the two, and there is a market for both fleece types.

## **Observation [A Very Important Tool]**

Don't feel guilty if you find yourself wanting to spend time watching your alpacas. By doing this you will get to know your alpacas and learn what is normal behaviour and when something is wrong.

## **Your Starter Pack**

You need to consider what sort of starter pack you want. Breeders will advise and make up a package that suits your land size, budget and breeding goals.

## **Diversify Your Genetics With Outside Matings**

Buying a stud male in your first few years of operation will limit your genetic herd diversity. Your dollars are better spent carefully selecting outside matings from proven stud sires selected to improve and enhance your initial female stock.

Your herd will not improve, if you never look outside your own fence line.

## **Farm Setup**

Owning your own land means you can have your animals with you. Starting off with a small number of breeding females, gives you time to learn as you breed up. Setting up your farm initially, to handle your small number of animals can be as easy as a laneway and a couple of spare gates to act as a 'catch pen' . This will allow you to bring your animals into a smaller area and make handling easier. It is a good idea to invest time in your animals and halter train each one if they are not when you purchase them.

Although alpacas look like they can manage very cold and very hot days/nights, they do need access to shelter. But again this does not have to be an expensive shed. A shelter can be as simple as some trees or a shelter made from wooden pallets and shade cloth.

Alpacas are not renowned for escaping from paddocks and generally will stick close by their mates if they do. It's a good idea to have ring lock type fencing at least on the boundary and Stud male paddocks. Barbed wire fencing should be avoided.

## **Many Uses for Alpaca Fibre**

As the industry has grown, fibre uses has progressed from the traditional Handcrafts (knitting yarn, felting, spinning, weaving) to commercially woven fabric, clothing, bedding, throws, and rugs. For the lesser quality fleeces carpet and Insulation products are now being produced.

## **In Closing**

Once you have decided to grow alpacas, you have asked your questions and done your research, You will be in a more focused position and will intelligently embark upon this very pleasurable and rewarding journey.