

ALPACA INDUSTRY FACT SHEET



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 2,000 alpacas.
- Peru has the world's largest alpaca population while Australia has one of the largest registered breeding herds in the world with more than 170,000 animals.
- Countries throughout Asia with previously small alpaca numbers are now looking to grow their herd sizes.
- Australian Alpaca are currently exported to the UK, Europe, New Zealand, Thailand and Turkey with export protocols now in place for Korea and Taiwan. Protocols with China and Japan are in development.
- In September 2014 the world's largest known shipment of alpaca was exported from Australia to China in a one-off dispensation agreed between governments. A precious cargo of 525 Australian alpaca flew on a chartered 747 Freighter from Melbourne to Shanxi province to form a quality breeding herd as China develops its alpaca industry.
- Demand in other countries continues to grow and the world's first shipment of alpacas to Turkey was exported from Australia in March 2014.



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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.
- 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. Recently, the first Quality Assurance Code of Practice for classing alpaca fibre was developed and other alpaca farming countries around the world are now looking at the example.
- Australia's world-leading authority on alpaca fibre, Cameron Holt has released the globally acclaimed book "The Definitive Guide to Alpaca Fibre" sharing more than 45 years of expertise in natural fibre industries. The book includes modern technologies in fleece production and critical collection and classing information. It has been hailed by many as a "bible" of alpaca fibre.

Australian Alpacas Around the World

- Australia is a key supplier of high quality stud animals on the international market.
- Many of the champion alpacas in the UK, Europe and New Zealand are Australian bloodlines that were purchased by breeders to improve the quality of their herds.
- Australia's National Alpaca Show & Sale is always well attended by international breeders and investors sourcing quality stud stock and learning about the ongoing advances in Australian breeding programs.

Meat Production in the Australian Alpaca Industry

- Australia is one of the few countries outside of South America that has an emerging meat market, and is at the forefront of "new world" production.
- 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 processed in both NSW and SA with selected breeders from around Australia supplying animals to meet growing demand in the food industry.
- A PhD study, partly funded by RIRDC, is now underway into the nutrition of alpaca meat and its long term sustainability in the Australian Alpaca industry.

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- Alpaca meat production has intrinsic value in the continuing development of alpaca as the next sustainable and fully viable commercial rural industry for Australia.

Prices in the Alpaca Marketplace

- Companion animals – usually wethered males – start at around \$350.
- Show quality stud animals start at around \$5,000 and regularly achieve prices in excess of \$60,000 depending on bloodlines and fleece quality. Top sales of \$175,000 and \$120,000 have recently been achieved for two Australian male stud champions.
- A single bale of high quality, low micron Australian alpaca has reached a high of \$66 per kilo setting a new standard for the finest alpaca fibre. Alpaca fleece prices depend on a number of quality factors including fineness, colour and suitability for processing, plus the quantity of consistent fleece available for commercial production.
- Large quantities of high quality low micron fleece in white and light fawn are selling for more the \$60 a kilo. Medium quality fleece, also in lighter colours, is consistently achieving around \$25 a kilo and prices range down to \$3-\$5 per kilo for strong fibre and skirtings which are used in bedding and carpets. Small quantities of unique or specialist fleece that is used by hand spinners consistently sells \$10-20 per kg.
- Alpaca garments and homewares – quilts, pillows, blankets and even carpet - are priced at the upper end of the market due to the rarity of the fibre which has an exquisite luxury feel with an environmentally friendly appeal. Alpaca fibre comes in a range of natural colours so there is little or no need for chemical dyes or treatments.

Women in the Alpaca Industry

- Many of Australia's alpaca breeders are women attracted to the industry by the manageability of the animals. In comparison to other livestock, alpaca are farmed easily with minimal external input.
- Where men and women work together women often do much of the animal husbandry, making the breeding decisions and showing animals.
- Many women are involved in the processing of alpaca fibre using machinery and also hand carding and spinning. The manufacture of products by knitting, weaving and felting is dominated by women.
- There are a number of significant herds being independently managed and developed by young women. These inspiring future industry leaders bring fresh skills, energy, and expertise to the industry at a time when it is moving further towards full commercialisation.

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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 knowledge enabling it to quickly forge an expert international reputation for quality Australian alpaca fibre. Beneficial science brought to the world alpaca industry from Australia's wool industry has included SRS® and AGE advanced breeding practices, and colour genetics.
- Australia's International Alpaca Register (IAR) is an online animal registry and incorporates a sophisticated breeding predictor. The quality and detail of this Register further enhances the value of Australian alpacas on the world market.
- An Australian designed and manufactured fibre testing machine is a world leader used in more than 30 countries.
- 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 the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), 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 recently been involved in the establishment of the Australian Alpaca Youth to create a structure and forum for young breeders and teenagers interested in alpaca careers.
- Leading breeders, judges and camelid veterinary experts are contributing to the youth organisation with the motivation that alpaca plus youth equals future.
- In 2013, the Rural Agricultural Society at the Sydney Easter Show was the first in the country to introduce a Young Paraders Event for Showmanship and Stockmanship.
- A combination of show events, workshops and youth camps give AAY members opportunities to further develop their husbandry and handling skills and knowledge in judging fleece and animal conformation.

The Smart Future for Australian Alpacas

- The development of improved fleece processing techniques will assist in meeting the demand for high quality Australian fleece from both Huacaya and Suri alpacas.

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- 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 will generate 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.
- New export markets for fibre and product are forecast to open into Asia.

Who is Responsible for the Australian Alpaca Industry?

- The Australian Alpaca Association (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 our herd quality and worldwide reputation. The development of standards for the emerging meat and hide industry is now underway.
- AAA is recognised by the Federal Government as the peak industry body for the alpaca industry in Australia.
- The Association provides tools, information & support to bring owners together for the future of alpaca farming as a fully commercial industry.

ENDS