



14 WORKSHOPS IN 14 MONTHS

Over the past 12-18 months AAFL has put considerable effort in to making all aspects of fleece handling and transport simpler and more cost effective for growers of alpacas. We are aware that there are a range of issues that growers face depending on where they are in the country that affect how they consign their fleece to AAFL in Melbourne.

Some of the issues that growers face regardless of their location include transport costs for small lots of fleece, knowledge of how to correctly handle and package the fleece and knowing what fleece types AAFL actually want.

In some regions we have, with the cooperation of regional FLO's and collection points, been able to significantly reduce the transport cost of getting bales of fleece to Melbourne. We are continually looking for cheaper options for all regions and welcome suggestions from individual growers or grower groups.

Wool packs and clear plastic bags are now more accessible and cheaper for all regions, with 11 of the 14 regions receiving \$250 worth of packs and bags after supplying more fleece in the 2006/07 year than the previous year. AAFL has recently purchased clear plastic bags printed with the Alpaca Mark logo in bulk which growers can purchase and new or second hand wool packs are always available as well.

In October 2006 a new fleece handling manual was put together and made available to growers in a working draft format (available from the AAFL website or by contacting the AAFL office). With the help of grower feedback this manual has been updated a number of times in order to make the information as practical and helpful as possible for breeders regardless of the number of animals being shorn. Some of the information from the manual was also included the 3C's of fleece poster, designed to be placed in the shearing shed and provide brief information on fleece types and packaging during shearing.

There is however only so much that can be explained through manuals and AAFL realises that it is important that growers are able to get hands-on education in handling fleece.

The main way of improving grower knowledge on fleece identification, handling and packaging has been in the form of fleece handling workshops held at various venues across the country.

Since September 2006 AAFL has run or been involved in 14 fleece handling workshops, with workshops having been held in every mainland state at least once.

Workshops are mainly focused on giving growers hands-on experience handling and sorting fleece however during the workshops we also cover a range of issues including,

- Discussions on what commercial manufacturers require when purchasing fleece to turn into products.
- What AAFL does with the fleece once received at the classing facility.
- The limitations we have with alpaca currently such as relatively small quantities by commercial standards and the lack of processing facilities available in Australia and what AAFL is doing to overcome this.
- The major faults with alpaca, such as the presence of guard hair or coarse primary fibres and coloured fibres in white fleece and how to identify these faults.
- Identifying positive traits within their own herd and how to select for these traits.
- Ways of implementing the efficient handling of fleece during shearing to make the shearing of your alpacas easier and more cost effective regardless of the number of alpacas owned.
- Hands on identification of the various parts to an alpaca fleece, with an emphasis on learning to correctly 'skirt' the saddle to remove any coarser fibre from the edges.
- Correct packaging of fleeces and how to reduce the transport costs associated with sending your fleece to Melbourne.

The aim of these workshops is not only to improve the handling of alpaca fibre on farm before being sent to the AAFL classing facility but also to teach growers about what they are producing and how to identify faults and positive traits within their own herd, when selecting animals to purchase or for use as a stud service.

We hope that being able to identify these issues will help growers continue to produce better fleece year after year resulting in higher returns to growers for fleece as well as continued improvement in the quality of finished products made from Australian alpaca.

The workshops also give us the opportunity of explaining the considerable changes that have happened at AAFL over the last 12 months, including the introduction of our own label 'Australian Alpaca Connection' which AAFL is now making an exciting and ever growing range of products under. Australian Alpaca Connection products are now sold in around 300 shops nationwide as well as being exported to stores in Asia and North America.

Many thanks must go to the regional FLO's or regional members who request to have a workshop in their area, as well as their work in finding suitable venues and making other growers in their region aware of the workshop. Without these growers AAFL would not be able to run the workshops to the level they have been.

Finally AAFL is looking into and applying for any available subsidies from Federal and State organisations that would allow more workshops to be run at a reduced cost to the regions and AAFL. If there are any regions who are interested in holding a workshop, they are encouraged to contact the AAFL office to discuss the options available.