



## All About the Snap

### **A letter from the editor of Hobby Farms.**

By Karen Keb Acevedo

It's easy to make judgments or assertions about something when you don't know much about it. You can simply agree with what you hear others saying and join the chorus. How many of us are guilty of this? "Oh, alpacas are a pyramid scheme," I've overheard some individuals say, without ever having taken the time to examine the alpaca industry, visit a farm, talk to owners, attend a seminar or show, etc.

Prior to covering alpacas in Hobby Farms, I did a considerable amount of research on them. Several years ago I took a multiple-day course on breeding and raising them at Northwest Alpacas in Hillsboro, Ore. (a fabulous opportunity!); I've studied books and done Internet research, but most importantly, I've visited several alpaca farms and spent days with their owners, asking questions and discussing various aspects of this market.

Only after this process do I feel qualified to enter a conversation about this complicated and multi-faceted industry.

Alpacas are raised by people wanting to run a farm-based business. They love living rurally, they love animals, they want to spend most of their time on the farm, perhaps raising their children, and they want to be financially independent.

Alpacas are a pedigreed-livestock business. The goal of the American alpaca industry is to eventually be the leading supplier of genetics and breeding stock to the rest of the world by breeding a superior alpaca with the finest fleece. With enough animals, a sound national market for alpaca fleece that achieves economies of scale will be developed.

As it stands now, the number of alpacas in the United States is not sufficient enough to convince large wool mills to convert their equipment to process alpaca fiber. The entire annual national clip of alpaca fiber could be processed by one of these large mills in just a few days. So, many more animals need to exist before a viable market for its fleece can be established. For more animals to exist, more breeders are needed to raise them.

Breeders of alpacas earn income in two ways: by selling breeding stock to other breeders and by selling fiber. The former is certainly more lucrative than the latter. Eventually, that equation will be the other way around, and will mirror the sheep industry in this country and abroad.

Becoming an alpaca breeder is akin to entering the stock market. It's a gamble. Almost everything in life is. If you have the right stuff—initial capital, livestock husbandry skills, an outgoing personality and business acumen—you could be quite successful at it. If you go in half heartedly, don't do your research and make bad choices, you'll inevitably fail, just as you would on a virtual Wall Street. Read "The Alpaca Advantage" by Adrian Stewart on page 56 for a breeder's advice about entering the alpaca business.

The next time you find yourself about to make a snap judgment, bite your tongue and head to your computer first. Someone's livelihood could be depending on it.

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