



October 2012 Newsletter of the Maine Alpaca Association

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A Warm Hello to the Maine Alpaca Association and Alpaca Friends,

As the leaves transition from their bright colors of peak season to the gentle muted shades of sand I am reminded of why I love living here in Maine. The continual cycle of pulling out the warm alpaca wear while at the same time our alpacas show the growth of what will be Spring harvest before we know it, moving through the rituals and routines that include warm stews, glowing embers in the wood stove and the beautiful skies of Fall and Winter. No wonder alpacas love Maine!

Farms across Maine continue to comment on the increase in visitor traffic and if this winter's weather is as predicted, warm alpaca wear will be on the shopping list for many. If you are selling retail products now is the time to stock up and remember, many future alpaca owners begin wearing the end product before buying alpacas!

Our September meeting was great fun as we delved into some hands on work with alpaca fiber. Felting soap, dying yarn and playing in the wading pool with bubble wrap and alpaca fiber were just some of the highlights. If you haven't yet had an opportunity, check out the pictures posted on the MAA Facebook site.

Plans are in the final stages for our FIRST ANNUAL MAA GALA, which will be a holiday gathering with alpaca friends and family on November 30th at the Frontier restaurant in Brunswick, Maine - and we'll have the restaurant to ourselves! Details and invitations will be coming out soon. MAA will be covering half the cost of all meals and we will be asking for RSVPs so stay tuned.

In closing, thank you to each of you who put so much time and energy into the many fairs and festivals across the State of Maine this year. The effort is great and the returns are many!

Sincerely,
Robin Fowler, President

UPCOMING EVENTS....

October 20 & 21 - New York State Sheep and Wool Festival at Rhinebeck, NY

www.sheepandwool.com

November 3 & 4 - The Fiber Festival of New England at West Springfield, MA www.thebigc.com/ese/esevents/Fiber_Festival.asp

November 13 - MAA Board Meeting www.mainealpacaafarms.com

November 30 - 1st Annual MAA Gala, location & time TBA www.mainealpacaafarms.com

March 13, 2013 - Neonatal Wet Lab with Dr Cheryl DeWitt at Cloud Hollow Farm
www.cloudhollowfarm.com

Please visit www.maineairs.org for agricultural fair dates in your community



BREEDING FOR BETTER FLEECE

Pamela Harwood, Longwoods Alpaca Farm

Recently, I was asked to give a talk at the Common Ground Fair's Fleece Tent aimed at handspinners who wanted to learn what to look for in choosing to buy alpaca fleece. I talked about the attributes of alpaca as they relate to handspinners, such as low scale height, which leads to less drag; woolen vs. worsted lengths, which invite more or less twist for more or less loft and stitch definition; and uniform vs. hairy fleeces that spin up into lovely or prickly yarns. We then went over to the alpaca fleeces to see what was available for sale. Frankly, I was embarrassed. Why? Because most of the fleeces didn't look like they had been skirted of the coarsest belly fiber, and if they had, they were still very hairy blankets.

What do I mean by "hairy?" Hairy fleeces can be one or both of the following:

- A) a fleece that has lovely, crimped, fine secondary fibers supported by longer, stronger primaries that extend more than $\frac{1}{2}$ " beyond the staple, and/or
- B) a fleece in which the fiber looks uniform in length, but when the staples are opened up, much stronger primaries are visible – one textile producer has described them as "fenceposts." Yuck!

While handspinners don't have the same centrifugal force as mini- or commercial mills, eventually those stronger fibers will work their way to the outside of the strand and will irritate the wearer – that is known as "prickle." Want an example? Look at the current issue of *Alpaca Culture* magazine. I cannot imagine why they chose that hairy handspun to grace the cover of their "Focus on Fiber" issue, because this is exactly what we are trying to get away from! Again, yuck!

Years ago, I sold one of the "B" fleeces at Fiber Frolic for \$2.50/oz. (\$55). I was thrilled, thinking how great it was to be able to sell raw fleeces for decent money. Yay for me, but what did the buyer get? If a handspinner is going to pay \$16 - \$48 per pound, spend all the time necessary to skirt (which I should have done!) wash, card and spin the fiber, why did I think they would like to work with a hairy, much less unskirted, fleece? Hmmm

We have promoted alpaca as "The Fiber of the Gods," but honestly, much of the fiber we are currently producing comes nowhere near the fineness and uniformity of what the Incas were producing for their royalty. I argue that over the past 28 years, much of our industry has been "color blind" – if it has won blue or purple, that alpaca must be good – even if it was only 6-12 months old and never won again. We forget that in the ring, the blues and banners go to the best presented to the judge **that day**. They are not evaluated on an absolute scale, as they are in a fleece show. Plus, in both halter and fleece shows, did that alpaca win a blue in a class of one or in a class of 12?

Continued on page 3

Focus on Fiber Seminar October 27, 2012

8:30 AM – 4:00 PM
Kennebec Valley Community College,
Fairfield, Maine

The purpose of the seminar is to equip Maine sheep, fiber goat, and camelid producers with the skills and knowledge to improve production, handling, and marketing of high quality fiber and fiber products.

Topics will include:

- Fiber basics – sheep, goat, and camelid
- Management to improve fleece quality and quantity
- Genetics to improve fleece quality
- Preparing fleeces for sale, shows, and processing
- Primary fleece markets
- Marketing and value added processes

[Register for Focus on Fiber Seminar](#)



Seminar presenters include Maine farmers, processors, fiber promoters, and customers experienced and knowledgeable in quality Maine fibers.

The cost of the seminar includes lunch and resource materials (printed and on CD in Word and Excel formats). If you have dietary restrictions, please contact Colleen Hoyt

The Maine Alpaca Association is a proud sponsor of this important seminar.

BREEDING FOR BETTER FLEECE

continued from page 2

The result is that most non-livestock alpaca owners have been making breeding decisions based on ribbons won, not necessarily on fiber attributes that will produce the more desirable “elite fleece”. When Cameron Holt came to Maine to talk about breeding for elite fleeces, he showed us how to identify them, but it still took me several years and a course on fiber sorting to understand what I really needed to **DO** to improve the quality of the fiber on my farm.

The recession has forced alpaca breeders to reconsider their business plans. We can no longer easily sell any alpaca for tens of thousands of dollars simply because it has a “nice” pedigree and has won a few ribbons. We are running out of room in our barns and therefore cannot breed all uteruses. We **MUST** focus on the fiber. We need to be able to demonstrate that an alpaca is a worthy candidate for our breeding program: it is not only conformationally correct, but also produces a uniformly fine fleece. Better yet, if it is a male, we must show that he is successfully passing on his elite attributes, even when bred to a lesser quality female.

In the next few weeks we will have the opportunity to learn more about how to improve our fiber and bring it to market for maximum profit. The University of Maine’s Co-operative Extension Service is hosting a day-long FOCUS ON FIBER SEMINAR on Saturday, October 27 - see the sidebar for more information on this exciting seminar.

We owe it to ourselves to learn as much as we can about what we are producing and how to improve it in order to become self-sustaining, even profitable(!) operations in a difficult economy. And we owe it to the public to offer for sale the best fiber possible to eliminate the comments that I hate to overhear, that alpaca, though it might be “soft” (heck, acrylic is “soft”), prickles, pills, and sheds. Yes, it can – but it doesn’t have to!



Maine Alpaca Criations

Graceland Alpaca Farm, Laila Roukounakis, Lisbon Falls

Black Valor, M, TB, (H), 7/3/12, Sire: Ace of Spades, Dam: MFI Dalia



Blue Moon, M, DB, (H), 8/31/12, Sire: Liamuiga, Dam: MA Reba

Phantacia Rose of Graceland, F, LRG, (H), 10/5/12, Sire: Graceland's El Camino Real, Dam: WTA Phantom



Justa Alpaca Farm, Brenda Simoneau and Fulton Butler, Farmington

Lindzie's Shining Star, F, WH, (H), 9/13/12 Dam: Tricky Woo, Sire: Magnito



Upper Farm Alpacas, Greg and Nicole Carter, Pownal

Upper Farm's Calliope, F, MF/WH, (H), 5/16/12, Dam: Andes Farm Fiona, Sire: Hearns



Upper Farm's Morgan Callan Rogers, F, TB, (H), 7/4/12, Dam: SL Cinnamon, Sire: Milo Rawhide



Upper Farm's Irena, F, DF, (H), 9/19/12, Dam: Andes Farm Zarina, Sire: Upper Farm's Zephyr



Upper Farm's Sapphire, F, B, (H), 9/1/12, Dam: April's Charm, Sire: Milo Rawhide



Rhapsody in Z, M, MB, (H), 7/10/12, Sire: Spruce Ridge Zapata, Dam: LAF Antonia



RosaBelle of Graceland, F, MDRG, (H), 8/23/12, Sire: The Aga Choco Khan, Dam: Bella Dulcinea



More Criations...

**Bag End Suri
Alpacas, Jill
McElderry-Maxwell,
Pittsfield**

BESAME Tâd, F,W, (S),
7/22/12, Dam: BESAME
Sirius' Tingilindë, Sire:
WRSR Peruvian Payday



BESAME Saira, F,W, (S),
7/26/12, Dam: Nanda,
Sire:WRSR Peruvian
Payday



**Farm in the
Meadow, Jan and
Craig Wanggaard,
Richmond**

FM Mallory, F, MF (H),
8/31/12, Dam: FM
Millicent, Sire: Snowmass
Royal Rose

FM Michaela, F, MB (H),
9/10/12, Dam: FM
Marisol, Sire: TGF
Drifter

FM Maeve, F, BB (H),
9/11/12, Dam: FM Marie,
Sire: Pacific Crest
Microsoft's Mustang

OUR FIRST CRIA

Brenda Simoneau, Justa Alpaca Farm

Wow, where did the summer go? Seems like it should be only May! I spent a lot of my time watching and waiting for our first cria to arrive. Well, wouldn't ya just know the due date came and went with "NO BABY." Bummer. Then on September 13 I went out to the barn at 6:15 like always and all the girls are outside looking intently at something. I go out around the door to see what they are looking at and there on the cement pad all wet and shivering is a tiny white baby alpaca. So what do you suppose I do? I am on a dead run through the barn to the house yelling "We got a baby!" and grab the camera as I am running for dry towels. Oh yeah, why would I leave those in the barn?

Anyone that is new to the Alpaca business has lots to learn. For me the best thing I could have done was purchase alpacas from Linda and Alan Russo of the Alpaca Barn in Whitefield. The support from these friends can never be replaced or repaid. So my next step was to call support and sure enough, they arrived within a couple of hours. No way would we have succeeded with all of this without Linda and Alan.

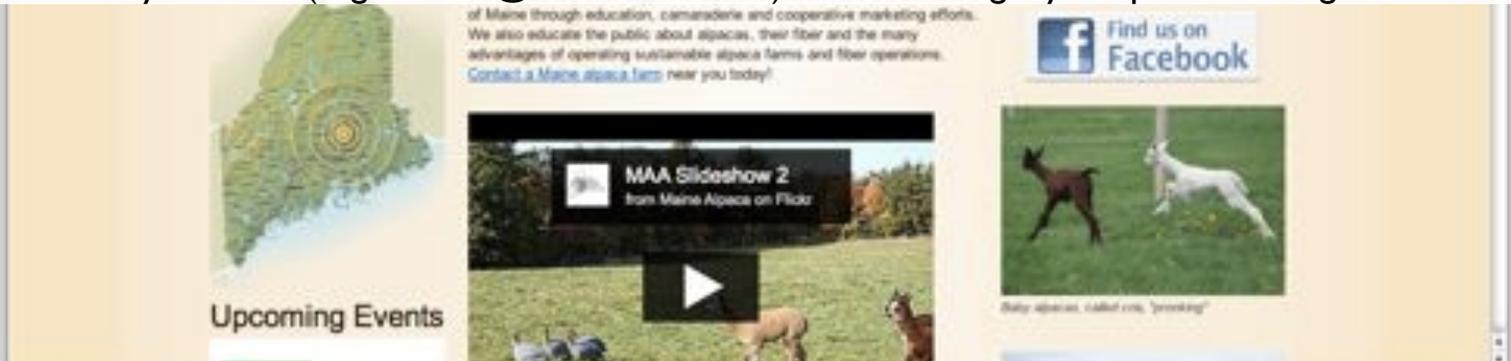
Anyway our cria is a girl! And no, I am not partial - she is beautiful. Just as white as white can be. Well, until she found a bare spot and rolled in the dirt at just six hours old! We have a tentative name pending ARI registration of Lindzie's Shining Star. Star weighed in at 13 lbs at birth and today just keeps on growing. What an experience for a new alpaca owner.



It's live - the new MAA website!

Alpaca Association

The new MAA website is up and it looks great. Members have the ability to add as much or as little information to their *free* OpenHerd page as they wish, and not only can you sell alpacas, you can also showcase products for sale. If you haven't set up your *free* OpenHerd account yet, don't delay - you won't appear on the site until you have published your farm page with OpenHerd. Having trouble or need a few questions answered? Don't hesitate to contact either Janis Piper (jansalpacas@gmail.com) or Jill McElderry-Maxwell (bagendsuris@roadrunner.com) We want to get you up and running!



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**The way an alpaca meeting should be - lots of learning and laughter!
Be sure to join us for our next one.**



“I cannot put into words all that I learned from this MAA meeting. I have to say this was one of the best meetings I have ever been to for any organization. Hands on might not work for everyone but for me that was the ultimate...My brain keeps going over the colors of the rainbow when it comes to dyeing my fleece. Kool-Aid just seems too easy...I cannot wait to have it all cleaned and start the crock pots. Yep, note the “S” on pots. I plan on more than one color for sure. Also the felting ideas that went around the pool were awesome. Hopefully I will get to complete some items like that. Just so many ideas and not enough time to get my hands in all of them. Thank you to everyone that shared their knowledge and demonstrated how to complete the tasks. I for one totally appreciated all the effort. Oh, and the food and company was great also!”

- Brenda Simoneau, Justa Alpaca Farm