

ALPACA SHEARING AND CLIP PREPARATION

Preparation for Shearing

Whether preparing to shear one animal, or a large number, preparation for shearing starts in the paddock. Major problems are caused by excessive vegetable matter contamination, particularly clover burr. If vegetable matter contamination is very bad, fibre will have little commercial value.

Prevention is the best cure. Shearing should be before the grass seed season. Other methods used to prevent contamination may include pasture topping (chemical or mechanical) or shedding. As alpacas love to roll, dust can also be a problem in the fleece, but unless it is extremely heavy it will scour (wash) out.

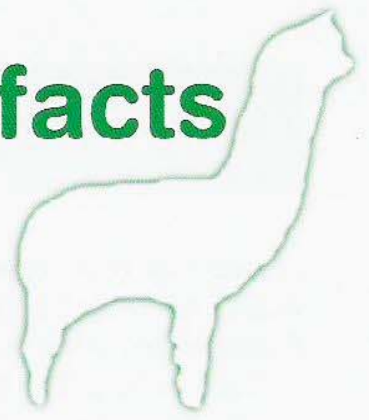
A purpose built shed is desirable, but other sheds may be adapted. Animals should be separated from the shearing area, which in turn should be separated from the fibre handling area. Sheep shearing equipment is used but plant should be run at a slower speed to prevent overheating because of the lack of natural grease in the fibre.



Shearing

Until recently alpacas have generally been tied between two posts for shearing, using ropes and leg spreading boards. While this method works well for smaller herds the development of shearing tables, with animals restrained at waist level rather than on the ground, is desirable when managing larger numbers.

alpacafacts



Alpacas should be presented for shearing in colour, age and sex order. Generally the light coloured and finest are shorn first so that fleeces can be best sorted and to minimise the risk of dark fibre contamination.

During the shearing process the various parts of the fleece should be separated as they have different end uses. The parts are the saddle, neck, legs, belly and apron. The saddle is the best part of the fleece; the neck is often similar but shorter; the belly, legs and apron are usually stronger and may include coarse guard hair.

Clip Preparation and Classing

The object of clip preparation is to maximize the potential return for the fibre. The amount of clip preparation will depend on the number of animals, the amount of information available on individual animals and experience.

The major physical characteristics to be considered when classing the clip are fibre diameter (micron), handle, colour and length.

Fibre diameter is measured in microns and is the single most important commercial raw fibre characteristic.

Alpaca fibre comes in many colours. Amalgamation of some colours is currently necessary to ensure sufficient, useable quantities.

Different manufacturing processes and machinery will dictate the way fibre is prepared so length requirements may vary depending on the marketing method chosen.

The Australian Alpaca Cooperative Ltd at Geelong in Victoria, promotes and markets Australian alpacas fibre and products. It provides detailed information of all aspects of alpacas clip preparation, classing and packaging.