

Basic Alpaca Husbandry

Alpacas can be a fantastic animal to have on your property. They have low impact on the environment, can be used to protect flocks of other animals (such as chooks and sheep) from predators and are really cool looking! Also, when they deliver their baby it is called “unpacking”!!

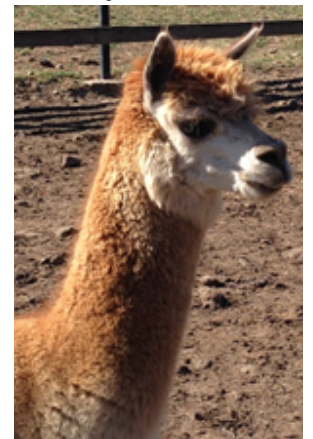
The following is a guide for people planning on keeping just a few alpacas as a hobby.

• **Basics:**

- Adult weight – 55-90kg
- Birth weight – 6-9kg

• **Feeding/watering:**

- Ad lib access to pasture. Can be supplemented with hay as needed.
- Can feed loose sheep supplements if needed
- Ad lib access to clean fresh water. Check water DAILY.



• **Shearing:**

- Shear Alpacas during Spring (we can sedate and shear them, but professional alpaca shearers will be cheaper and do a neater job!)
- Check teeth, eyes, body, feet (trim if needed) at shearing time.
- Alpacas don't grow fleece under their tail and around the breech area – low risk for fly strike and no need for crutching or mulesing.

• **Feet**

- Trim feet as needed. Depending on how much rocky ground they are running on, this can be 2 to 4 times a year. Trim the nails so they are level with the pad. Check them and trim at shearing too.

• **Castration**

- We castrate alpacas surgically under sedation/anaesthetic and give them LOTS of pain relief!
- Done before 2 years of age will often prevent the fighting teeth from developing. These are very sharp canines which can need treatment if they are causing problems eating.

• **Breeding:**

- Males reach sexual maturity at about 2.5-3 years old. This is generally when the “fighting teeth” come through.
- Females reach sexual maturity at about 12-15 months old (45-50kg).
- Females do not come “on heat” like many of our other animals. They can breed any time of year. Ovulation occurs after mating.
- Males may pursue a receptive female for up to 10 minutes until she sits to allow mating. Mating usually lasts about 15-20 minutes (can be up to 55 minutes).
- After ovulation (or if pregnant) females are not receptive and will refuse to sit, run away and spit if a male shows interest.

- Pregnancy can be detected with ultrasound from around 30 days of gestation, however there can be a lot of early embryonic losses, so it is a good idea to confirm after 60 days gestation.
- Pregnancy lasts about 342 days (ranges from 320-380 days)

• **Vitamin supplementation:**

- Alpacas often require Vitamin D supplementation in Southern Australia. Maximum dose is 1500 IU per kg.
- Cria should be given 1000- 2000 IU of Vitamin D twice, 6 weeks apart in winter in Victoria to help prevent Rickets.
- We use Vitamin ADE at a rate of 0.03ml/kg. Give into muscle (in the front of the thigh).



• **Worming:**

- Alpacas poo and wee in specific areas and don't graze near these which helps minimise the chances of them picking up worms
- Only drench if they have worms (bring in poo samples for us to check if you suspect worms are a problem). Generally we recommend drenching if faecal egg counts are over 300 epg for alpacas under 1 year old and over 100 epg for alpacas older than 1 year.
- Graze crias on rested paddocks to reduce the number of eggs they may pick up
- New alpacas should be drenched before being introduced into the herd.
- No products are currently registered for alpacas in Australia, but sheep and goat drenches have been used successfully- such as Moxidectin and Fenbendazole. You need to be careful using drenches as worms are developing more resistance to our common drenches.

• **Vaccination:**

- Vaccinate with 5-in-1 using the cattle dose. Give it under the skin at the base of the neck.
- Crias should be vaccinated at 8-10 weeks of age and then given a booster 4-6 weeks later.
- Annual booster vaccinations should be given at shearing.

If you are concerned about the health of your alpaca for any reason, please give us a call: 0357 214 000

• Handy resources:

- Australian Alpaca Association: www.alpaca.asn.au
- Alpaca Breeders Reproduction Handbook. McMillan, E. and Jinks C. & A.