



Alpaca
Association of Ireland

.....

AAI Newsletter

 *Spring 2021*

Welcome to the AAI
Newsletter Spring 2021
issue!

Thanks so much to all who
contributed. Our gorgeous
Spring-themed photo is
brought to you courtesy
of Moonhall Alpacas, Co.
Kilkenny!

As always, we would
welcome contributions
from across the spectrum
of the alpaca community
in Ireland. With this in
mind, our next Newsletter
will be in July 2021 and we
would be delighted to hear from you, so get typing!



Feel free to email your articles to info@alpaca.ie or directly to me (Paula Lunn) at ashfordalpacas@gmail.com.

.....

Committee Goings-on..!!

Paul McDonald, Chairman AAI

A warm welcome to all our members, new and those more established. Following an incredibly challenging 12 months, I think there is a chink of daylight on the horizon. Fingers crossed we get to enjoy a fruitful summer ahead.

While there has been literally no interaction on a national scale amongst the membership, the committee has been working away in the background on all things Alpaca. Our first ever AGM via Zoom, while a challenge for sure, would never replace the chatter of a room full of Alpaca enthusiasts sharing biscuits and stories. Hopefully, we will get back to that scenario at the end of this year.

One of the main topics raised at the AGM was the tricky subject of TB testing. Helen Eivers has been liaising with the Department of Agriculture in this regard and, while very much in its infancy, is making good progress. We will endeavour to keep you all updated on progress as it moves along. We will require input from as many members as possible to advise on how you see fit to proceed with testing. The Department themselves are only getting a handle on the Alpaca industry as it is now, so it's all new to both sides. As with all negotiations, communication is the key and both Paul O'Brennan and Helen have made steady inroads with the Minister and his staff, so fingers crossed we can reach a mutually beneficial arrangement. Testing methods and fees, compensation and our own AAI code of conduct in this regard are all up for discussion, so we will be calling on you all for your tuppence worth as we move forward (albeit slowly !!).

Thanks to all who have registered their cria so far. Michael has been very busy with the registry and we can now start to see the fruits of his labour. The registry is a fantastic tool for all members but the work that goes into getting to this point shouldn't be underestimated. Uploading data alone is a very onerous task and inputting detail for generations on a family tree for one Alpaca can take up to two hours. With this in mind, we are proposing out-sourcing this secretarial work in the near future and using some of the registration fees to fund it. As with all decisions, we will run it by the membership once we have more info.

It's looking increasingly unlikely that we will be having a halter show this year but fingers crossed 2022 will herald the return of the Show Ring and we're looking forward to some really strong competition with two years of new cria sneaking under the radar and into contention. In the meantime, we can always try our hand at the next best thing, fleece

shows. With shearing looming, why not give it a go and get your fleeces into the show ring to be assessed. It's a great tool for having some useful feedback on the quality of your fleeces and some pointers on where you might look to improve your breeding in the years ahead. Don't be afraid of buzzwords like 'skirting' and 'organic matter'. If in doubt, ask about. There are plenty of experienced members out there more than willing to lend a hand, remotely or otherwise. We will run a tutorial in June on line on how to prepare your fleece for the judges. This will, hopefully, be via Zoom for all to see and will be a good opportunity for us all to "meet up" for a virtual biscuit.

Shearers are going to be busy this year , so get on to yours now and make a date. We are also looking at doing a couple of workshops in the late summer/autumn. Topics for these are as yet not decided upon, so if there is a particular topic you would like to see discussed, please email us at info@alpaca.ie and we will try to include as many as possible.

Finally, thanks to Paula for undertaking to revive this newsletter. We have always thought it a worthwhile exercise but it needs someone committed to putting it together on a regular basis. It also needs lots of content folks, so please send what you can for inclusion, pictures, stories, good news, bad news, jokes et al. It doesn't matter, Alpaca related content is what we need, so don't hesitate.

Very best of luck with Cria-Watch '21 and remember, there are plenty of really helpful members out there if you encounter any difficulties ok. Just pick up the phone or use our Alpaca Chat platform on Facebook

Stay safe in the meantime.

Paul

Farm Focus - The Flying Alpaca

by **Barbara Veterano**

The Flying Alpaca is an interactive farm based in Kilkee, Co Clare, founded by myself Barbara and my husband Mike in 2017.

I am a web designer and Mike used to work in aviation, but tired about our office base job, and willing to create something with our hands, we decided to move from France to create an alpaca farm on the Wild Atlantic Way!

We opened our bed and breakfast and got horses, bees, chickens... only alpacas were missing!

We attended some training on basic husbandry and got our first herd in June 2019. Our animals were very wild and not really human friendly, so we got our experience on the field, trying to get that trust from them day after day.

We started offering basic alpaca experiences like meet & greets, working with them on a daily basis, our animals' behaviour improved very quickly. Finally we were able to offer alpaca walks!



We fell in love with suris, such wonderful and bold creatures, and contagated by this famous "alpaca addiction" we purchased 2 more suris from Glaslough Alpacas in Monaghan, and imported 3 from Germany.

Now we have a small herd of 8 alpacas: we prefer quality to quantity and we are specialising in grey suris. Grey is our favourite alpaca colour and with a Harlequin Grey stud and some appaloosa grey and silver grey girls, we look forward to next year to focus our breeding effort on this colour.



On the same page, we learned from scratch to treat the wool, from raw to yarn and we are now able to sell our products (from the raw fleece to the beanie) to our guests, visitors and online followers. I attended a training on natural dyeing and am now able to dye my fleece using products coming from my farm, vegetable garden and orchard! We try to use everything from the alpaca fleece: we learned how to use it in our vegetable garden, we make homemade soaps with alpaca fleece, and alpaca pillows.



In late 2020 we founded the West Alpaca Group, with the aim to unite all the scattered farms in the west of Ireland. When we started in 2017, it was very hard for us to find information, having a good vet and sourcing drugs for our alpacas here in Kilkee. All the farms were looking so far away, all clustered around Dublin! But when we founded this group and saw the members growing, we realized we're not so far away, and we'll be able to create a very strong and resourceful community.

We had our first Zoom meeting just before Christmas, and we plan to have more in the following months; the idea is to meet in real life once this pandemic is over. During these meetings we talk about a specific topic, such as sourcing the drugs, or a good vet for our animals or shearing and basic husbandry. We look forward to having more activities in the future and creating a good and reliable marketplace for West Ireland.

I already created a website for the WAG, listing all members' farms, with their position and details, so anyone knows who's close to them. More pages with very useful and important information will be added soon, so stay tuned! The website access for the moment is granted to members only.

For the moment it's a simple whatsapp group, but everyone finds it very helpful, so if you are based in the West of Ireland (from Cork to Donegal) and are looking for information, tips, vet advice or just want to have a chat, don't hesitate in joining us, we're growing quickly!

The Flying Alpaca is now an AAI and BAS member, offering all things alpacas! From experiences with alpacas, Grey Suri breeding, to alpaca products sales.

Barbara & Michele,
The Flying Alpaca



Husbandry tasks for the Spring months

Task	April	May	June
Feed hay ad lib, feed pregnant and nursing dams extra protein			
Body score, check for jaw abscesses, check teeth and toenails, look for evidence of mites and treat if necessary			
Continue halter training weanlings			
Give a mineral drench, especially to pregnant females and weanlings			
Get poo samples checked regularly for evidence of worms (Faecal Egg Counts); this is of particular importance in the Spring months			
Weigh pregnant females and weanlings regularly to monitor weight gain, record details			
Insert microchip in weanlings and register with AAI			
Harrow fields/paddocks, fertilize and reseed if necessary			
Plan matings for this year, especially if you want to avoid winter births			
Check heavily pregnant females regularly for signs of labour from 10 months gestation onwards			
Prepare birthing kit in readiness for upcoming births: old towels, cria coat, latex gloves, antiseptic spray for navel, disinfectant, lubricant, long arm gloves, umbilical clamps in case of bleeding from cord, weigh scales, colostrum, bottle and teat, thermometer			

.....

Sunny South East Alpaca Group Fleece Show

Saturday 31st July 2021

The Sunny South East Alpaca Group (SSEAG) are delighted to announce our first ever All Ireland Fleece Show, open to all alpacas, registered or not, on the island of Ireland!

The Fleece Show will comprise of Junior (6-12 months), Intermediate (12-24 months), Adult (24 to 48 months) and Senior (over 48 months) Classes for both Huacaya and Suri fleeces, and will be judged on Saturday 31st July.



We are privileged to have **International Alpaca Judge, Roger Clarke**, kindly agree to judge the fleeces, and for this we are very grateful to him!

Entries are now open and the closing date for receipt of entries is **Friday 2nd July**, or when the entry limit is reached. Entries cost €15 per fleece, with a maximum of 4 fleeces per farm.

If you'd like to enter your fleeces in the Show, email ssealpacagroup@gmail.com and we will send you the entry form, a clear plastic bag for the fleece, instructions on how your fleece should be prepared and packed for the Show, and where to send it. The deadline for fleeces to be delivered is **Friday 16th July**.

Apart from the thrill of maybe picking up a rosette or two, this is also a wonderful opportunity to get your fleeces assessed by an expert in the field and will be invaluable in helping you plan your future herd direction, especially in the absence of our National Alpaca Show this year due to Covid-19. Any questions, please feel free to email us at: ssealpacagroup@gmail.com

Fleece Glorious Fleece

by **Trish Kerr, Irish Alpaca Yarns**
Mobile 087 2131320; Email irishalpacayarns@gmail.com

Spring has definitely sprung in the last few days and you may be thinking of the delights of new life arriving all around you, the daffodils and crocuses, birds nesting, lambs bleating in the fields and of course beautiful cute alpaca cria. It will definitely do your heart and mind good to be outdoors.

If you are enjoying your alpacas you will be planning shearing. Whilst shearing your alpacas is first and foremost for their welfare, it is also your harvest. The first chance to see the results of the last year's growth of beautiful fleece.

This is such an exciting time. You now have the best fleece you will ever have from your alpaca, the best raw material ready to use, at your fingertips. Now you only have to decide what you would like to do. The possibilities are endless. Every scrap of fleece has a use, from the very finest blanket which can become equally fine yarn and then garments, to the scraps that will be a gift for the birds to line their nests, and a million uses in between.



Imagine the excitement and the pleasure of giving or receiving something special where you and your alpacas are the complete story..... from the field, the fleece to the finished, fabulous creation.

If this is your first harvest don't be daunted or overwhelmed by this task. Help is at hand. This summer whilst adhering to Covid19 guidelines and protocols Trish Kerr will be doing a number of workshops to help you get the most from your fleeces. Space will be limited so early booking is essential. So whether you just want to skirt, sort and store your fleeces until you decide what you would like to do with them; or if you have a special project in mind for you or a friend to create. Maybe you would like to do it all yourself, learn the beautiful, relaxing art of spinning on a traditional spinning wheel and then knit, crochet or weave the yarn into a totally homemade creation.

Maybe you would just like to sell your fleece and make sure that they are used to the best advantage. Trish will also be organising collection points around the country to help facilitate this. The best place to start is with a conversation with Irish Alpaca Yarns.

Hands on is the only way you can learn how to skirt fleeces



The Winning entry in Alpaca Association of Ireland Craft Show 2020 created by Anne Mathers with yarn from Astonelle Agatha, Astonelle Buddy Boy, Astonelle Atom, Astonelle Houghton Sorrel Astonelle Freddie, Astonelle Black Knight



Olann Mills, Cavan Town

By **Jess Kavanagh**

With a background in fashion knitwear, armed with a move from Cork to Cavan, and a newborn baby to boot, I decided to set up a hand dyed yarn business during my maternity leave in 2016. I was inspired to do this when I was designing knitwear as too often the yarns available lacked the colours I was influenced by and had little to no provenance about it. As the hand dyeing business grew, I wanted not only to be able to dye my own yarn but to create it. I did process Irish fibre from time to time in the UK but thought it was a great shame that there was no artisan mill available in Ireland to do the same. It was from this I decided to establish Olann Mills just outside Cavan Town.

Olann is a semi-worsted mill that has the ability to process fibre for individuals in batches of 1kg or more. We can spin alpaca, wool and other rare breeds into a range of yarn weights including Lace, 4ply, DK and Aran. We have thirteen machines in our studio that allows us to process raw fibre to yarn. To begin the process we firstly assess the fibre; we look for quality, staple length and cleanliness of it. We have a very gentle washing facility which uses an organic soap to remove lanolin oil from sheep fibre and dust from alpaca fibre. Once the fibre is dried and loose vegetable matter removed, we pick the fibre and prepare it for carding. From here we are able to process it in numerous ways, from batts to roving for hand spinners or felt makers, or spun into yarn which can be finished onto a cone, into a ball or skein. The beautiful fibre can be used for knitting, weaving and other crafting projects.

Here at Olann we have put together some pointers about fibre processing:

Fleece can be divided into 3 categories when they are being sheared.

- Firsts - This is the blanket fleece from the animal's back and sides as is the best quality fibre on the animal.
- Seconds - Neck fleece and good quality fleece from the tops of the legs. If they are of decent quality, they may be processed but will create a more yarn a higher loss of fibre will also occur due to the large presence of guard hair.



- Thirds - Belly and lower legs, I would not recommend using this for processing - however it makes great compost!

If you are thinking about processing your fibre, the most important thing to remember is the quality of it. If your fibre is contaminated with vegetable matter, seeds or twigs, it will contaminate your yarn and cause issues with your processing. Another source of contamination we have spotted is the presence of dandruff in both sheep and alpaca fibre. The clumps of dandruff present can be embedded deep into the shaft of the fibre, making it quite difficult to remove, but it is really important to remove.



Once sheared, the next phase is to skirt the fleece. There are 5 key steps in this process.

Step 1: Lay out the blanket on a large table with preferably a mesh top. Check for any dandruff on the fleece. You can spot it by looking for small flakes throughout the fleece, they can also be found in larger clumps of fleece. If your fleece does have dandruff it is really important to remove it by pulling it out. If left on the fleece, it can cause problems when being processed and will be present on your yarn after processing.

Step 2: Remove any vegetable matter present in the fleece. If any part of the fleece is matted or a heavy presence of vegetable matter, it is best to simply remove these. Any seeds, twigs etc simply take out and ensure the fleece is tidy.

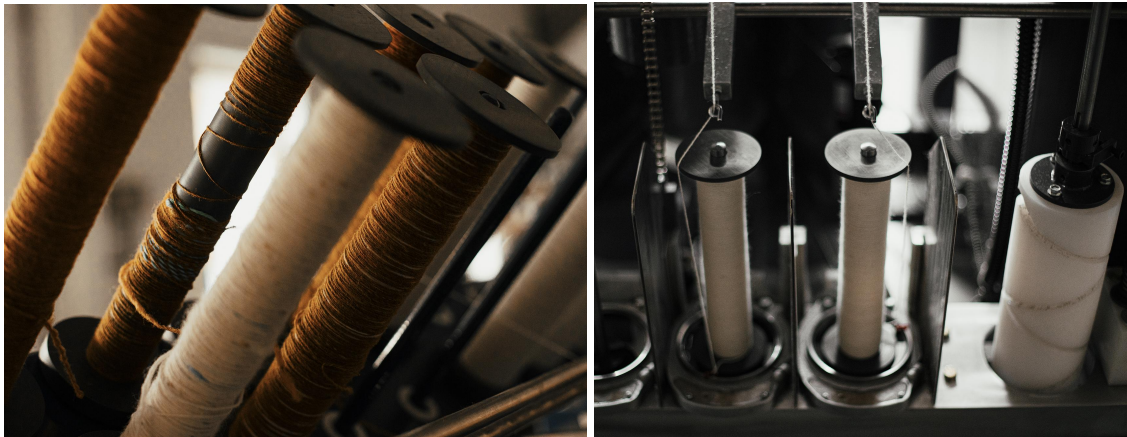
Step 3: Look for a differentiation of fleece edging 'skirting line' in the blanket. This is where the long soft fleece begins to get shorter and coarser. There may also be a lot of straight, stiff guard hairs. Remove the areas of blanket that are short, coarse and stiff.

Step 4: Turn the fleece over to check the 'cut' side. Any excess guard hair should be removed and also any clumps of short fibres (seconds) from the shearing process. If left in they may cause a slub in the yarn.

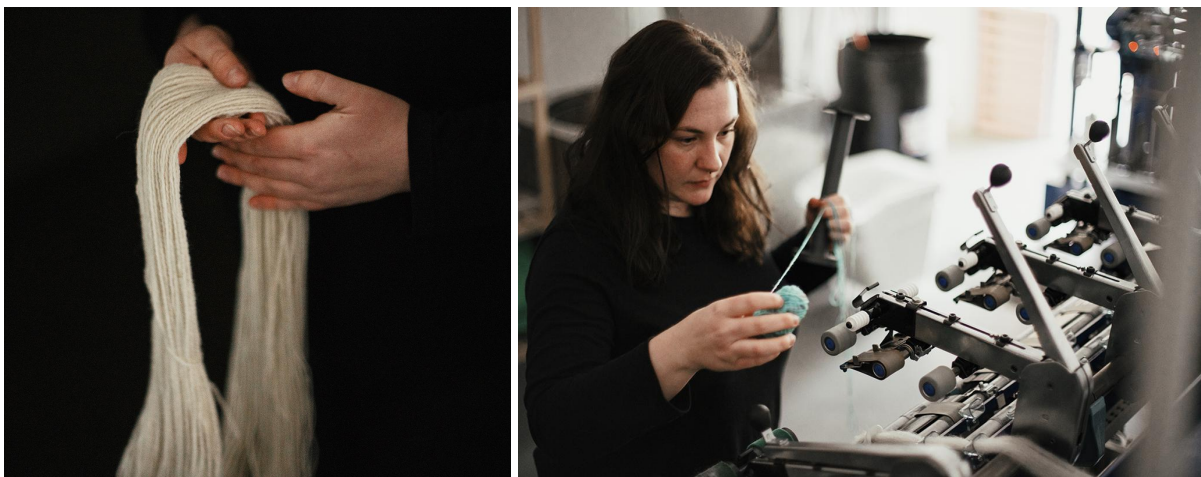
Step 5: If you have fleece from your second's bag that is similar in its fineness to the fleece but just a little shorter it could be included in the blanket once it's over 5cm in length.

It is a good idea to label your bags of fibre. People use lots of different storage solutions for their fibre, there's no right or wrong way. Good examples include clean potato sacks as they allow the fibres to breathe. If you are using Polythene bags make sure they are not in direct sunlight as it may make the fibre sweat otherwise, and will arrive at us or other mills wet.

If you have fibre at home or are shearing later this year, it is really important to keep it in a dry space without any moths, mice or temperature extremities until processing. It can be stored optimally for up to 3 years after which the fibre may become a little flat.



Once you have all your fibre ready and want to get it processed, decide on what you want to have it made into (yarn, batts etc). Your fibre is charged on an incoming weight. The average return rate for alpaca fibre is 70%, while Criá / Suri has a higher loss unless mixed with another fibre due to the nature of the fibre. The return rate of wool can be anywhere between 40% and 70% depending on the breed. The lower rate for sheep is because of the composition of the fibre, it is coarser with grease and lanolin present.

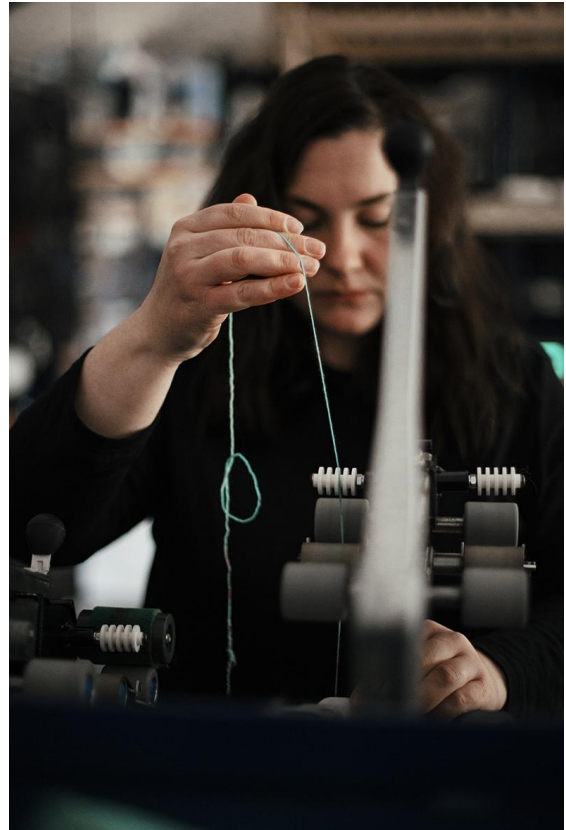


The big decision is what type of yarn you would like spun. This really depends on what you'd like to make with it. You could process a fine yarn suitable for a shawl or a weaving, or go for a thick yarn for a knitted jumper. If you are unsure you can always discuss this with us, we are happy to help. As our mill processes individual batches it is important to know that the yarn spun may have variation in thickness and colour. Every fibre is different and there can be variation between batches, for example, darker fibres usually spin out heavier than white fibres so there can't be a guaranteed specific weight. The yarn can then be spun onto a cone or into individual balls depending on its intended use.

There can be a considerable wait time for processing fibre. If you are interested in getting fibre processed it is really important to book in your slot even if the fibre isn't shorn yet.

The most important thing in spinning fibre is to have clean, good quality fibre to work with.

If anyone would like any more information from us, you can drop us an email at **mill@olann.ie**.



WEBSITE: <https://alpaca.ie>

