



AAI Newsletter

☀️ Summer 2021

Welcome to the AAI Newsletter Summer 2021 issue!

Thanks so much to all who contributed. Many of us are in the midst of the birthing season and this photo is brought to you courtesy of Wexford Alpacas!

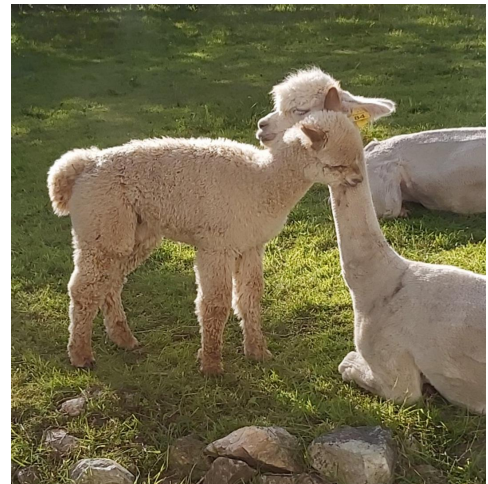
We have a variety of topics in our latest Newsletter which we hope you will find interesting. Our Farm Focus is on Glaslough Alpacas, Co. Monaghan, where Janet and Annabel describe how far they've come in a short few years!

International BAS judge, Roger Clarke, of Amberly Alpacas, has kindly written a detailed description of what a judge looks for in a fleece, which is very timely given he will be judging at the Sunny South East All-Ireland Fleece Show at the end of July. It makes for very interesting reading, and if you feel so inspired, there's still time to enter your fleeces to the Show!

The topic of TB and its devastating impact on alpacas does not make for “feel good” reading, so we commend the bravery of Carmel Mahony (Wexford Alpacas) on telling how this terrible disease wiped out her first herd of alpacas. TB is a disease that could potentially affect any of our farms, so an emphasis on good farm biosecurity, including Enferplex-testing prior to sale or movement of animals, will go a long way to keeping TB out of our national alpaca herd.

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 October 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.

All the best, Paula



Committee Goings-on..!!

Paul McDonald, Chairman AAI

Hope this edition of the Newsletter finds you all enjoying the summer weather and of course, welcoming lots of new cria to your farms. Cria season makes all the drudgery of winter chores so worthwhile and, with such a long gestation, a test of your patience too. Breeding decisions you made last summer come to fruition now and, once healthy, these new arrivals never disappoint.

Hopefully, shearing is coming to completion now too, so the alpacas feel better and look all the better for it too. The only question now, is what to do with the 'Fibre of the Gods'? There are so many options and it's great to see all the different ways people utilise their fleeces. So, don't store it, use it now and create something unique from your own herd. The skirting Zoom this week shows how simple it is to work with your harvest or to use it as a tool to assess your herd. Thanks to Elaine for presenting it so well.

The Zoom meetings held throughout the past few months were a great success and very well attended. They were both informative and educational. There will definitely be a place for these workshops as we move forward, though we all agree, there's nothing like doing it in person with some like minded individuals and a cuppa.. We hope to revisit our 'Affiliate Training' programme in the Autumn. We had to park this for obvious Covid-related reasons but, now with things opening up, we should be able to open the tender process again and will bring you news on this at the AGM.

Recent committee meetings have been somewhat overtaken by TB discussions and welfare concerns amongst some of the membership. The TB discussions with the Dept. are ongoing, but in reality, this will be a slow burner folks. More to follow on this...

Some welfare issues that were brought to our attention are being dealt with and we endeavour to treat these with both urgency and sensitivity. The AAI protocol on selling/buying alpacas is there for all to read and we really cannot stress enough how important it is for these to be upheld, in particular by the seller when dealing with new entrants to the alpaca family. Expecting the 'buyer to be aware' just isn't good enough in my opinion.

Moving through the year, we will definitely arrange more Zoom workshops, so please advise if there is a particular aspect to alpaca husbandry you would like covered. Hopefully, it won't be long until we're planning an actual show with real people, real alpacas, real rosettes and not a laptop in sight!! Until then, enjoy the summer and, in particular, enjoy your alpacas!

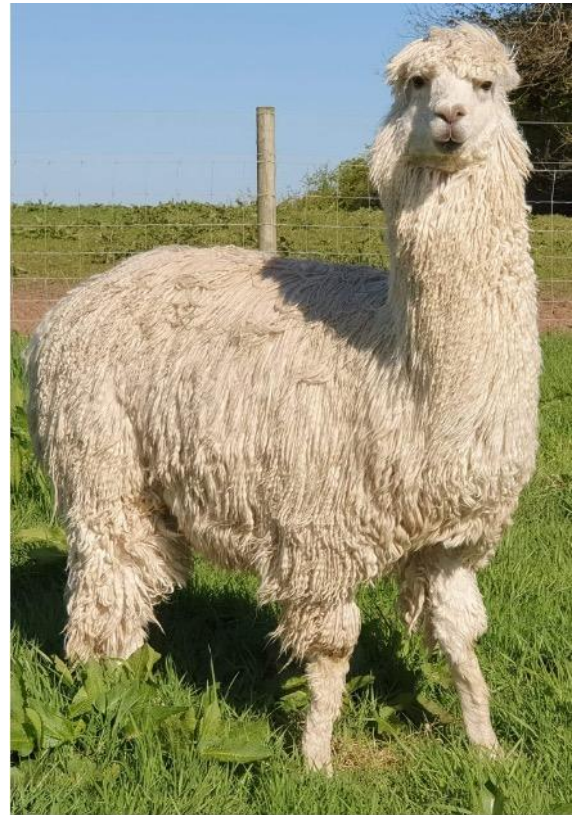
Paul

Farm Focus - Glaslough Alpacas, Co. Monaghan

by [Annabel Magee and Janet Morrison](#)

Just how did we come to be alpaca breeders?

We often sit in our field surrounded by our magnificent herd of alpacas and reflect to ourselves, how did we get here? If you'd told us 10 years ago we would be alpaca breeders we would have laughed. Janet worked in Belfast as a nurse and in later years as a Manager for the NHS. I myself lived in Brighton for 20 years enjoying my life to the full with every weekend spent on the social scene. We both made a move to Monaghan 7 years ago where we built a house and new life on my family land near the picturesque village of Glaslough. I was brought up on a Dairy farm and found myself returning to the family land and my farming roots. We have just over 7 acres and started our adventure with Anglo Nubian goats, which we still breed on our farm. We very soon discovered that the goats were only interested in eating the hedges for us so it was time to research what else we could add to our farm.



We wanted livestock that would be light on the land and that we would be able to handle. Again and again, we were drawn towards alpacas and started reaching out to other alpaca owners and breeders. We met Roger and Elaine of Amberly Alpacas and invested in a starter herd of 3 pregnant females and 2 yearlings. We were very fortunate at the start of our alpaca journey to have had such valuable support and guidance from Amberly Alpacas (which I might add is ongoing to this day!), we thank them for their ongoing support, education and friendship. Two of our pregnant females were Suris which we had a particular interest in and we have continued to breed Suris here at Glaslough Alpacas. We are proud to say that we were the first Suri breeders to show in the Alpaca Association of Ireland National Show. We are delighted that since then more breeders have Suris in Southern Ireland.



Doing Big Things in a Small way

We have between 20 – 28 Alpacas on our farm at any one time, we focus on quality not quantity. We invest in the best possible stud match for our girls each year. We enjoy spending long periods of time with our alpacas and know each one individually with all their little quirks and personalities. We have recently ventured into the Agri-tourism sector and are offering Alpaca Meet and Greet Experiences. This was borne out of people's genuine interest in these animals and was a natural progression from requests to visit our farm.



We thoroughly enjoy seeing the happiness and delight in people's faces when they come and spend time with these fabulous animals, and watching our alpacas confidence grow as they interact with different groups of people. One of the particular interests that Janet has with her nursing background is that we host a lot of care homes and schools, in particular with adults and children with learning difficulties. It is truly beautiful to see them interact together and the therapeutic nature of this encounter is an aspect that we hope to develop.

The Product

As we all know, alpacas are fleece producing animals, and it is our passion to be able to produce end products from their fabulous fleece. We are in partnership with a local designer, Liz Christy, who is a hand weaver. She is helping us to produce high end, high quality woven scarves made from both Huacaya and Suri yarn.



During the winter months when we aren't tending to the goats and Alpacas, we knit hats and scarves which prove very popular over the Christmas period. I am hoping this winter to perfect the art of spinning and have some truly artisan yarns.

We adore our alpacas and are both invested in ensuring that people who visit us on the start of their alpaca journey are as well informed as we can make them in issues regarding welfare and husbandry. We are members of the Alpaca Association of Ireland, Northern Ireland Alpaca Group and the British Alpaca Society. During the lockdown period whilst unable to attend courses in person, we have availed of the many webinars hosted by both of these groups, hence keeping up to date with all things alpaca!

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Husbandry tasks for the Summer months

Task	July	August	Sept
Feed hay ad lib, along with daily portion of alpaca nuts. Keep water troughs well filled, especially on hot days when the alpacas can get very thirsty.			
Body score, look for evidence of mites and treat if necessary, check for jaw abscesses, trim topknots and toenails.			
Get alpacas sheared.			
Check FAMACHA (eye membranes) for signs of anaemia, and get poo samples checked regularly for evidence of worms (Faecal Egg Counts)			
If flies are bothersome, spray alpacas with fly deterrent (e.g. citronella-based sprays), taking care not to spray in eyes. Keep a close eye out for fly strike, which can occur very quickly on broken or damaged skin.			
Continue halter training weanlings.			
Keep an eye on grass growth: if you can't see a beer bottle on its side in the grass, it's too long and needs topping!			
Weigh pregnant females and weanlings regularly to monitor weight gain, record details.			
Check heavily pregnant females regularly for signs of labour from 10 months gestation onwards			
Weigh newborn cria daily for the first 1-2 weeks to ensure sufficient milk supply from dam. Weight gain should be 100 - 200g daily.			
Do matings and test for pregnancy via spit offs. Ultrasound can also be used to detect pregnancy from about 40 days post-mating.			

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The Show Must Go on!

Having enjoyed a busy year on the judging circuit, Ireland's own BAS judge **Roger Clarke**, consoles us on the absence of the much loved halter show by enthusing and encouraging us to take the plunge or at least dip our toes, into the wonderful world of fleece showing.

Why Alpaca Fleece?

Globally revered as the 'fibre of the gods', alpaca fleece has long been prized for its many desirable properties and is used by a wide range of devotees; from cottage industry artisans to those in the commercial fashion industry.

As such, I feel that it is incredibly important that breeders and other members of the alpaca industry have a clear understanding of the nature of what constitutes 'desirable fleece traits' and the impact that such traits can have on the commercial viability and value of their alpaca's fleece.

In my view, entering and consequently, receiving feedback from a judged fleece show, offers just that opportunity.

So you've entered a fleece show...

It's quite understandable that the reasons for entering a fleece show will vary from exhibitor to exhibitor and will depend on people's individual contexts. Despite the reasons however, one thing rings true; all of those who enter, will receive an appraisal of their fibre characteristics...knowledge that can then be used or applied as the individual sees fit.

This information may be used in lots of different ways and again depends on the individual farm and their context. It might, for instance, be used to help breeders track their progress e.g. for a specific trait, to benchmark themselves at a particular level of development or to help identify strengths and/or areas for development in terms of their future breeding goals.

Such feedback may also have a hand in helping to determine the end use, level of processing and quality of products made from the fibre itself.



Preparation is Key!

All fleeces entered into a show are usually comprised of the prime blanket fleece that has undergone some level of preparation by way of skirting. Although, I would go as far as to say that preparation quite often begins before shearing, whereby animals might spend a period of time in a clean paddock or area that may help minimise the environmental impact on the fleece.

As a process, skirting involves the removal of any undesirable elements such as; unwanted fibre (coarser fibre, colour spots etc.), vegetable matter and any other foreign bodies. Here the overall aim is to help the fleece be shown and judged to its best advantage.

Whilst I firmly believe that preparation is key, it is also worth noting the importance of striking a balance, as 'over preparation' can, in fact, have a detrimental impact on a fleece's feedback. Such over preparation may include practices such as over skirting as well as other more abrasive and potentially disqualifiable routines such as trimming, brushing and washing.

So what's it all about?

Before judging, fleeces entered for showing are organised and sorted for competition in terms of breed type (huacaya and suri), age and colour. The judging process itself involves the systematic approach of an absolute scoring process; that of assigning points to a series of characteristics that are of economic importance. The process is designed to ensure that each fleece is assessed individually, with points being allocated for the virtue of each characteristic.

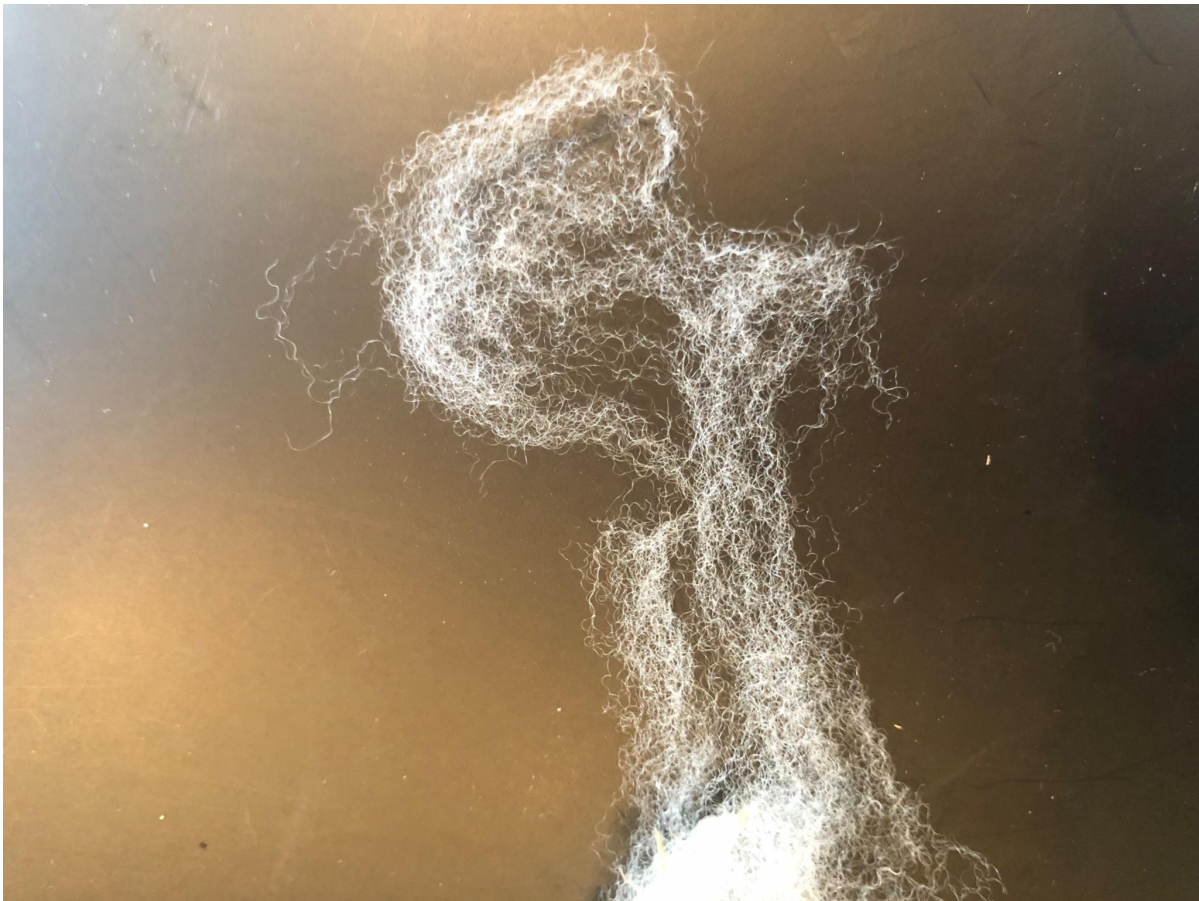
The characteristics involved for huacaya are those of; fineness and handle, uniformity of micron, length and colour, character, staple type/density, brightness, lack of guard hair, lack of impurities and clean fleece weight. Similarly, the characteristics involved for suri are those of; fineness and handle, uniformity of micron, length and colour, style and character, density, lustre, lack of guard hair, lack of impurities and clean fleece weight.

If we consider each of the characteristics in turn, you will notice that each are important in terms of processing and therefore, economics, as each will contribute to determining the overall quality of the end product.

Let's begin...

With a fleece presented before me, I begin my judging process by selecting 6 samples of fibre from across the blanket, whilst ensuring at least one is extracted from the mid-side. This mid side sample is then fanned out across a dual coloured card (black and white), allowing me to make a visual assessment of the micron. Whilst doing this, it is always important to maintain the integrity of the fleece and to select the samples with care.

A total of 15 points are allocated to fineness and the score takes into account the fineness displayed across the entire fleece, thus serving to highlight the importance of pre-show preparation.



A fleece sample depicting good uniformity of micron

Up next is the characteristic described as 'handle'. Here, I am making an overall assessment of the relative degree of softness displayed by the fleece, with the addition of the degree of coolness exhibited, in the case of a suri. Influenced by both age and micron (including uniformity of micron), a total of 5 marks are available for handle and again, a lack of preparation can have a detrimental effect on your potential score.

Following handle, consideration is given to 'Uniformity of Micron', where a total of 10 points are available. This is a measure of the evenness of fineness throughout the entire fleece, a trait that is once again strongly influenced by the degree of preparation. As you will appreciate, when you have two fleeces that are of equal quality, the better skirted fleece will always score higher.



An illustration of the transition line of where the fibre begins to coarsen towards the edge of the blanket

The next set of 10 points are awarded in relation to 'Uniformity of Length'. Here samples are lined up side by side to allow for a visual assessment of the uniformity of fleece length across the entire blanket. Consideration is being given to the commercial lengths for processing and a poorly shorn or poorly prepared fleece is likely to have much less uniformity of length than a fleece that has been carefully shorn and skirted. Fleece length must be a minimum of 2 inches for huacaya and 3 inches for suri and a maximum of 6 inches for huacaya and 18 inches for suri.

Uniformity of colour or the evenness and regularity of colour throughout the entire fleece, is marked out of 5 points and is again a very important trait in terms of processing and economic value. Character and style (10 points) and density (5 points) are also very important and are quite often linked as indicator traits of quality. In both cases, a visual and tactile assessment are made when allocating points.

The next trait to be considered involves a measure of the reflection that occurs when the light hits the fleece, that of brightness for huacaya (10 points) and lustre for suri (20 points). In order to make my assessment, I prefer to take both a visual and tactile approach, by extracting a sample and moving it in the light. This helps to identify the sample's positioning and place, along what is in essence, a brightness/lustre continuum.

As we near the end, the next quality to be considered, is that of the presence of guard hair (5 points for suri/10 points for huacaya). Whilst almost all fleeces will exhibit some degree of guard hair or medullation, a poorly prepared (skirted) fleece has the potential to contain

a higher content. Medullated fibres can have a negative impact on both the handle as well as various aspects of processing including the absorption of dyes and so, as in the case of the aforementioned traits, this one will have a significant and direct effect on the quality of any processed fibre and ultimately the end product.

The penultimate fibre trait to be judged is that involving 'lack of impurities/stain/tip damage' (5 points). Here, many different elements are considered, all of which being relevant to the processing potential of the fleece. This includes how clean and free from contaminants the fleece is and how sound/strong the fibre is etc.



A fleece which exhibits a lot of contaminants including Vegetative Material

In addition to contaminants, an assessment of the soundness of the fibre is also a necessity. This involves a 'hands on' method of checking whether or not the fleece is tender. If tenderness is found, the varying degrees will result in a loss of marks, in both this category as well as in its uniformity of length score.

Similarly, a further aspect for consideration within this category is that of 'cotting' (matting). A cotted fleece will receive 0 marks at this stage, whilst a partially cotted fleece will receive between 0-2 marks. It is therefore pertinent to consider the overall state and soundness of a fleece, when choosing whether or not to enter it into a fleece show.

Finally then, the tenth and last category for judging is that of the 'clean fleece weight' (15 points). In this respect, the weight of a fleece is annualised in order to ascertain a weight and consequent score, for a given growth period. Here, unskirted fleeces may achieve a greater weight score but as you'll now appreciate from the aforementioned, they WILL be penalised in so many other areas!

Give it a go!

With the lack of halter show opportunities, I hope the above might give you some encouragement to 'give a fleece show a go!'. This serves as a guide, detailing some elements of how a fleece is judged and how the judged characteristics feature as a focus, economically. If it's your first time, don't allow yourself to become overwhelmed with the idea of having to present a perfectly prepared fleece. Make your first objective to have fun, and use the feedback you receive as the first building block towards achieving your future goals!



A prepared fleece, bagged up and ready for the show.



Our Story About TB

by Carmel Mahony, Wexford Alpacas

Our names are Geoff and Carmel. We bought our farm in Wexford two weeks before lock down. Our plan was to start a herd of alpacas. My brother had died tragically the year before so to mark his 1st anniversary we decided to take delivery of our first three pregnant girls and a cria. We called the cria Andrew, after my brother.

From the beginning we noticed one of the girls, Mitzy, coughing. We called the seller to see if he had noticed anything and he said he hadn't. Along with the cough we noticed her shake her head quite a bit. She also held her ears 'lopsided', she kept herself away from the other and was dribbling. We called the vet out and put her on an antibiotic for a chest infection. The following morning she had a stillbirth and continued to be very unwell and off her food now too. We syringe fed her natural yogurt with honey and their feed ground up in it to keep her going. She was holding on and finally started eating again after nine days.

That same evening one of the other girls, Violet, went into premature labour and delivered a little girl who appeared unwell. She had very noisy breathing and could only breathe through her mouth. We called the vet who thought it might be fluid in her lungs so treated her with steroids. She was still struggling with breathing, hadn't stood up or fed all through the night. We brought them to UCD large animal hospital and left them in their care. We got a call that evening telling us she had a genetic disorder called Choanal Atresia, the nasal cavity doesn't open so they can't breathe through their nose. It is a fatal condition so she wouldn't live. As it is a genetic condition we were advised not to breed mum again. By the time we got up to collect Violet the cria had died. We brought Violet home.

Within a couple of days Mitzy was off her food again, dribbling and losing condition quickly. Back up to UCD with her and on handover I mentioned she had a cough. The vet asked for how long so I told her it had been since we got her about 6 weeks before. On my way home the vet called to say that Mitzy was too ill to treat and asked our permission to put her to sleep. We had already lost two cria and now our lovely Mitzy was gone too. We didn't think our hearts could take any more.

The following morning we got a call from UCD confirming it was TB. This meant the other two alpacas and Andrew, the cria, had to be tested. Your farm gets closed down, no stock in or out, notices at your gates and adjoining farmers informed. We had only moved in three months before and, because of Covid lockdown, had not even met our neighbours. We had no idea how this news would be received. We didn't know what to think or do. We had a visit from a vet from the Dept of Agriculture whose advice was to 'cull the rest' . We couldn't believe what was happening. We got in touch with the AAI to let them know what was happening on our farm and for advice. Other people started getting in touch as they had sick animals too and were wondering what to look out for and what to do.

We got our alpacas “Enfer”- blood tested and poor Violet came back positive. We had to separate her from the other two over the weekend until the vet could come out Monday morning to euthanize Violet. Our hearts broke even more. We then had to drive her to UCD for an autopsy. TB was confirmed. Our farm was still on lockdown. You have to wait sixty days before getting the others tested. It was a long sixty days but the two of them had no signs of being unwell so we weren't too concerned. Again we got them Enfer blood tested and mum, Ellie, came back positive. Andrew was clear. We couldn't believe it. We asked if we could get her re-tested and the Dept of Agriculture said that was ok. Once TB is confirmed on your own farm you just become a witness to everything that has to happen, the decisions are taken out of your hands! Before the results for the second test came back Ellie started coughing. We knew straight away it was TB even though she had no other signs.

Now came the totally heartbreaking decision, what to do about Andrew. He was negative but was still nursing from his Mum Ellie. Even if he was clear, we couldn't see how at some stage down the line he wouldn't develop it. The other thing was, he would be by himself for sixty days until we could get him tested again and if negative be able to get him company then. It would not be fair on him to be by himself and we couldn't do it to him. We called the vet to arrange euthanizing them both.

We couldn't get an answer from the Department of Agriculture about how long you need to rest the land after TB; it varied from no time at all to two years. There is no compensation for losing alpacas to TB. Our advice to anyone buying alpacas now, get them primed and then Enfer blood tested, even if you know the seller. If anything goes wrong you have no comeback.

We lost a lot of money but we have started again thanks to support from family and friends who knew our back story and wanted us to succeed. We watch every little sneeze and cough and went through our first crias birth in fear and trepidation of all that could go wrong. Nothing went wrong and we have a lovely little girl running rings around us all here on Riverstown Farm and hopefully will for a long time to come.

Carmel and Geoff

WEBSITE: <https://alpaca.ie>



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