



# AAI Newsletter

*Autumn 2022*

Welcome to the AAI Newsletter Autumn 2022 issue!

Thank you to all the contributors and a very special thanks to Paula Lunn, who has given her time in keeping us all up to date on membership news. It is no easy task and Paula is an absolute star.

We would like to hear from you, our fellow members, for the Winter Newsletter in January. Please send ideas directly to me, Jessica Leonard, at [learn@teacupfarm.ie](mailto:learn@teacupfarm.ie). I look forward to hearing from you!

We have had some interesting conversations about alpaca manure the past few months and would like to dig a little deeper into alpaca manure management. Would you please take a moment to fill in this very brief and anonymous survey? (click below) Do you have questions about manure management we could discuss in a future issue? There is a spot for that on the survey too.

[Take the Survey](#)

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# Message from the Committee

*Fiona McManus, Secretary*

The members of the AAI committee are currently busy preparing for the Alpaca Association of Ireland AGM on Sunday 27th November. We hope to see as many members as possible via Zoom on the day. An email will be sent to members by the 6th of November with last year's minutes, agenda for AGM and include information on committee changes, etc. Our three-year plan will be made available at the AGM and we encourage everyone to get involved in the organisation where possible. There are lots of places requiring help at different points throughout the year. A couple of hours here and there all add up!

The committee met monthly over the past year to discuss things such as the registry, shows and events and welfare. A lot of discussion this year revolved around the National show; streamlining entries and ensuring the venue could facilitate increasing entries.

Membership has continued to grow this year and we were especially delighted to see so many farms represented at our National show in Mullingar in May. There have been in excess of 1500 emails, hundreds of phone calls and queries through the website from members, vets, people interested in getting into alpacas and media requests keeping us busy.

The newest rules for registrations of animals is on the website and members are encouraged to make themselves familiar with them while registering this year's cria.

Thanks to Paula Lunn for editing our newsletters up until this summer and thanks to Jessica of Teacup Farm for taking it over.

See you at the AGM!

# Farm Focus

## Convent Field Farm, Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo

### *How the farm got started*

We have a garden centre for over 20 years. About four years ago, the two acres next to us came up for sale. We needed more greenhouse space, so we decided to go for it. We were successful with our bid. Now we had the land, the first job was constructing two new Greenhouses. We had the rest left in grass, and not being farmers, did not know what to get to eat the grass. We had no interest in sheep or horses. Christmas was getting close, and Paul's three children were looking for gift ideas for their dad. Paul had the idea they were getting him concert tickets for Madonna. You can imagine his surprise when a box arrived with Holly and Ivy—two pygmy goats! Paul's first comment was how do I mind them. We learned on the job, and it soon became a real pleasure caring for the goats. So that was the start.



### ***Learning the hard way***

Fast forward to April and we still had lots of grass. We spotted an ad on Done Deal for alpacas in North Mayo. So I said to Paul let's go for a drive and have a look. We got to the farm and saw alpacas for the first time. We chatted to the owner and after an hour we had bought two males and one female. We headed back to Ballinrobe, asking ourselves what the hell had we just done! The next week the three alpacas arrived. We were still fencing when they arrived. They looked so different unsheared and with the lovely big eyes.

We now had three alpacas we were afraid of and no idea how to look after them and so we started *a lot* of research. We made contact with Curraghduff Farm in Oughterard and found a source of the correct feed. Stuart and Ruth were so helpful with really great advice to help us know what to do and we made two great new friends. The three alpacas got the names Sage, Parsley, and Heather, our lovely female.



That early June we had asked Craig to shear them. He arrived and asked if we had alpacas long. We had them one month. His next question was whether we were going to catch them. We said no way. Craig laughed and walked in and caught the first one, making it look so easy. In the middle of shearing Heather, Craig asked if she was nursing one of the younger males. We said no. He then said, well she is pregnant so. We thought at first he was taking the piss out of us being so green. We were stunned at the news, but sure enough one week later Heather gave birth to a lovely male cria we called Clover.

We now had four alpacas and still very unsure what to do apart from ringing Stuart and Ruth. We decided we would have to learn more and were delighted when we saw an alpaca course with Amberly Alpacas. We booked in and off we went. Roger and Elaine were great and made us so welcome. It was a brilliant course—we learned so much and no question was too basic for Roger and Elaine who explained everything in detail to us. Meeting more alpaca people was great and more new friends were made like Mike and Barbara in Clare.

We learned very early in the day males and females should not mix and we had them together from the start. We had to make a plan to correct the problem, and after talking with Roger and Elaine, we bought another female to go with Heather. We decided to get a suri female for a change and Rosemary soon arrived on the farm. We then split up our herd in two, separating the male and female. Heather was immediately more relaxed with another female around. We decided after a lot of advice and a lot of male fighting that our farm was too small to have both male and female alpaca. We made up our minds to have a female only herd. So after loads of tears, our three boys left for a new home. We decided to buy another beautiful suri female from Amberly who we call Mistletoe. The next female to arrive was the grandmother of our herd, Agnes, who is 20 years old. She came from Curraghduff farm to retire with us. She is a great character with a strong will and as we say, she does what she likes and she is entitled to.

### **Cria**



We mated our two suri alpaca, Mistletoe and Rosemary, with a sire from Amberly, and after what seems years, finally two beautiful cria arrived. Mistletoe had a beautiful female we called Willow and Rosemary had a boy called Dill. There is nothing like watching suri cria running in the wind with the fleece shinning.

We halter trained at 10 months and after a few stubborn days, they both walk freely. After a long think we decided to enter our first national alpaca show. We did not know what to expect with never even attending a show before. With one week to go to show time and weather good, we put them in a paddock with nice clean fresh grass. All going very well and Willow and Dill nice and clean. The night before the show was wet so we put all in a clean shed to keep dry for the show. That evening on checking them, Dill had rolled in muck and was covered on one side. I was so mad, I said to Paul no way I am walking around a ring with such a dirty animal. I said to Dill you're not going anywhere looking like that. We had great advice and assured field conditions were OK. We put down a bed of straw and hoped for the best.

The next morning at 5.30 am, we checked and Dill had cleaned up well. We loaded up and headed for the show. We were delighted to be awarded Dill 1st and Willow 2nd in their class.

We had to let Dill go because of our female only herd and were delighted when he went to Dandelion Gang, not far from us in Kiltimagh. He has settled in brilliantly and Sean and Sharon are great with him.



This year we have had three more beautiful cria. Heather had a black and white female cria called Fern, Mistletoe had a fawn colour male cria called Bramley, and Rosemary had a female cria called Honeysuckle. And all doing well.

### *Husbandry*



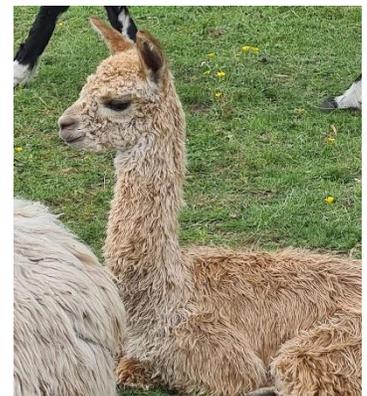
We have in recent months, with the help of Amberly and the Alpacas of Connacht group started to do our own injections. We found it very daunting at first, but now find our alpaca are more relaxed around us doing our own injections and we are growing in confidence with meeting other alpaca people in the Connacht group.

We had a very mixed start from being afraid of Heather to being completely at ease with all our alpaca. We would not be without them. We have a garden centre next to our farm and our customers, particularly children, love to visit all our animals but especially the alpaca.

We are currently on holiday in Gran Canaria and as we finish writing our story we do wonder if alpaca can live here to retire with us.

We can dream.

Paul and James



# Autumn Husbandry Tasks

Task	Oct	Nov	Dec
Feed hay ad lib, along with a daily portion of alpaca nuts. Keep water troughs filled and clean.			
Body score, look for evidence of mites and treat if necessary, check for jaw abscesses, trim topknots and toenails.			
For nursing dams and thin alpacas, supplement daily hard feed with Speedi-Beet (beet pulp <u>without</u> added molasses).			
Administer vitamins AD <sup>3</sup> E (oral paste or injection) every 6 weeks beginning Sept and ending March. Take care to get the dosage correct.			
Continue to check FAMACHA (eye membranes) for signs of anaemia, and get poo samples checked regularly for evidence of worms (Faecal Egg Counts).			
Weigh feeding dams and cria regularly to monitor weight gain, record details.			
Stop all matings so as to avoid late in the year births.			
Test for pregnancy via spit offs. Ultrasound can also be used to detect pregnancy from about 40 days post-mating.			
Ensure adequate supply of good quality hay and buy in if necessary.			
Plan paddock/field rotation for over the winter months, and try to keep the driest fields for the wettest months.			
Check and repair field shelters to ensure alpacas have good protection from the elements.			
Have some alpaca coats in stock, in both adult and weanling sizes, for poorly or shivering animals.			

# Regional Group News

## Sunny South East Alpaca Group

### **August - Cria time**

Every year we can't wait for birthing to start and then by August you are wondering if they will ever finish! It's been a very busy time with some later births, a steady flow of matings and the fun of constant spit offs!

All the while the group was still busy organising Heptivac-P bottle sharing to optimise use of each bottle and be as economical as possible - this year we dosed animals from April to October, with almost 300 adults and cria catered for. It was great to see everyone involved and animals receiving this important clostridial vaccination.

### **September - SSEAG Fleece Show 2022**



The second annual All-Ireland fleece show was held on the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> September. Moonhall Alpacas hosted the competition in Kilkenny. We were delighted to welcome Barbara Hetherington as our show judge this year and she kindly travelled from the UK to be with us.

The interest nationwide was super, with 114 fleeces entered. Approximately 30 farms were represented from the north and south of Ireland. A team of 12 ensured the smooth running of the competition from day to day and Barbara was very impressed with the standard and quality of the fleeces presented.

We want to congratulate all the winners and some of those who didn't quite make it to a ribbon who were also highly commended by the judge.

All entries received a full fleece analysis from Paul Vallaly from Art of Fibre on the day which is an invaluable assessment of an alpaca's fleece sample to keep. Each farm who entered also received a voucher for a free bag of Irwins feed. We would like to thank both Art of Fibre and Irwins for their support of our group and of all the entrants. Thanks to the committee also for their hard work both in the run up to and during the show.

### ***October -AD3E***

The shorter evenings mark the return of AD3E dosing for the group. Our lack of sunshine at this time of year means that levels of D3 need to be supplemented. This is particularly important in cria and younger stock where bone development is still in progress. Lack of this vitamin can cause Rickets, a painful bone disease which can often be avoided with routine AD3E administration.

### ***Upcoming events***

1. 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec 2022 – The Alpaca Education Centre of Ireland (Roger and Elaine Clarke) are back in Kilkenny presenting their basic husbandry course. This is a must for new and experienced owners. A full day of information and practical experience from which everyone will benefit. A great opportunity to meet new alpaca friends – these people often become your alpaca community, whom you will be able to contact throughout your alpaca lifetime.

Contact Adrian (087 7660786) for more information.

2. Late December signals the next AD3E dosing time – we will send reminders via WhatsApp nearer the time.

# Alpacas of Connacht

Ruth Newton

After a busy summer period the group enjoyed a welcomed Cuppa and Alpaca Chat Meet Up, hosted by group members Mairead and Shane from Galway Bay Alpacas. This was a great opportunity to share events over the summer, see pictures of the much-loved cria born and to simply check in with friends.



We also had the opportunity to meet Sandra and Sandra from Irish Fibre Crafters who gave fantastic demonstrations in spinning and wet felting. This really inspired us and gave us ideas in using those bags of fibre 2nds. We are already looking forward to the next Cuppa and Alpaca Chat Meet Up.

Group members continue to support each other and offer valuable services, including food distribution across Connacht, safe alpaca medication sharing and bulk ordering of vitamin pastes.

Some group members have had a bit of fun in sharing home-made Alpaca poop fire bricks. These bricks can burn for hours and surprisingly they don't have a bad odour. This seems to be work in progress, but it looks like we have some creative minded people within the group.

We are thrilled that Jessica Leonard, a fellow group member, has recently taken the role of editing the AAI Newsletter. We are sure she will do a fantastic job!

The group have also been invited to host next year's Fleece Show. We are thankful to the Sunny South East Alpaca Group for handing over the reins for 2023. They have done a fantastic job over the last 2 years and we hope to do them proud.

The Alpacas of Connacht Group are looking towards 2023 with a busy diary. We are hoping to finalise some dates soon for next year's events including more training, craft sessions, Meet Ups, Fleece Shows and more.

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