

## Feature for The Weekend Sun, January 2003

When Sue Richards first saw suri alpacas, she was captivated by the shimmering silken fleece. It wasn't long after, with some research all at Surico Alpaca Estate were convinced suri alpacas were the way forward.

In South America, the home of alpacas, textile processors claim no other natural fibre in the world has the same lustre as suri with its incredibly soft drape. They regard suri as the most luxurious natural fibre in the world.

Suri is scarce. Suri cloth is always brushed in the finishing process to bring out its natural lustre. It is referred to as 'green fur' as no animal is killed in the process. The fabric makes up into beautiful coats which are its primary end use. Processors in Peru say that demand exceeds supply in all markets and as coats offer a high value return, there is no need to adapt suri to other uses.

An added reason for pursuing suri breeding was that in Peru, suri fleece fetches 2-3 times more than huacaya alpaca fleece. It is heavier than huacaya fleece. Apart from the lower leg, the whole fleece is useable.

Researching the alpaca industry in Australia on a recent trip Brooke and Sue confirmed their direction into white suri. They have recently taken delivery of a nucleus of white females mated to several high class males imported into Australia from Peru. These will produce progeny equal to those of the top breeders in Australia.

Suri alpacas were first seen from the roadside on TaurangaDirectRd Kaharoa, last year when Surico Alpaca Estate moved from the Far North. Brooke and Sue Richards, with their daughter Hermione now run over 80 alpacas on their 12 hectare property.

The first suri at Surico Alpaca Estate were a group of coloured females and a stud male imported from Australia in 2000. These have produced a wide range of colours from white, through brown to black, including rose grey. They will continue this breeding and experimenting with crossing their huacaya to suri to produce these lovely colours. Coloured suri are even rarer than whites.

Suri is a breed of alpaca, differing from the more common huacaya alpaca in its appearance. Its fleece hangs in pencil-lock staples resembling curtains of silk that shimmer with every movement, emphasising the lustre. The huacaya alpaca fleece forms a bundle of staples, has crimp and grow out from the body, giving it that fluffy appearance.