

Feeding



Alpacas are "opportunistic browsers", and incredible converters of low grade forage. They will graze most grasses and the foliage of trees generally without stripping the bark.

Grass, hay and a clean supply of fresh drinking water is all a typical New Zealand alpaca requires. Generally they do not need additional feed supplements. The major exception to this is during high FE (facial eczema) periods, a supplement containing zinc is necessary to protect against liver damage.

Regular hands-on checks as to the "condition" of the animals is encouraged as a full fleece can conceal a thin alpaca.

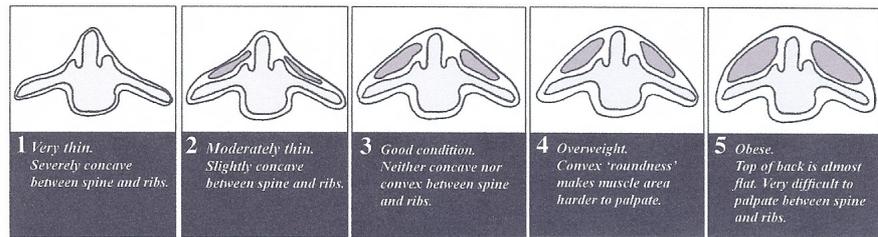
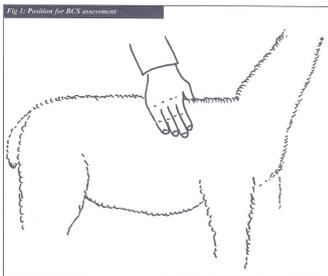


Fig 2: Cross sections for condition scores in alpacas: 1 to 5

Supplements

While alpacas don't generally need supplementary feeding, you can feed a small amount of "pellets" or "nuts" to make them more friendly or as bribery to come into the yards etc. Please be wary of overfeeding them on these foods as their digestive system is not geared towards grain based food and you may do them harm—as a rule of thumb no more than two handfuls of supplement per alpaca per day.

Facial Eczema

This is a problem in the later Summer and Autumn, a fungus in the pasture produces spores that are eaten by grazing livestock. These spores can cause serious liver damage to all livestock. There are methods of managing the problem. First do a "spore count" on your property to find out the level of risk, counts can vary hugely between properties so it is a good idea to have your property tested, your vet can help with this. The fungus can be controlled by spraying fungicide, we recommend spraying at least one paddock every 4 weeks so you'll have somewhere safe to put the alpacas if spore counts rise. Feeding a supplement with zinc added will give added protection to stock. Every property is different so please talk to us, your local vet or farmers in the area to find out the best management program for your farm.

Pasture

Some alpacas are susceptible to a condition known as "Rye Grass Staggers". This is a seasonal problem facing most classes of stock and is common when grazing the animals on some high producing ryegrasses. It is caused by an artificially introduced "endophyte" that helps to reduce insect damage to the grass. Unfortunately this endophyte produces a toxin (poison) that affects the nervous system in animals, causing them to get the shakes and in more extreme cases "stagger". If spotted in the early stages and the animals are removed from the pasture, they can recover completely once the toxin passes through their system.

Poison Plants

There are a number of toxic plants grown in New Zealand that can be harmful to stock. Plants such as Oleander and Rhododendrons if eaten can be fatal. Before taking delivery of your animals if you are unsure, ask a local breeder or farmer to check your pasture for inappropriate grass and toxic plants.

