

Rumpelstiltskin

Spinning suri fibre into gold

Newsletter September 2013

A year has passed since we began this project and it has proven yet again that developing a suri fibre industry takes a lot of time and hard work, but there is some light at the end of the tunnel and we hope to see a product out next year. This time frame hardly seems commercial, but the first run through was always going to be toughest and once the supply chain has been established and good working relationships developed with suppliers, we should see a much smoother and faster process developed.

Import from Australia

Our classing and collection days in New Zealand were very successful, we gathered over 60kg of Rumpelstiltskin grade and all learnt a lot about how to go about it. However, we required over 100kg as a minimum run and thankfully our Australian colleagues offered their support and donated 110kg to help us out. This effort was coordinated by Paul Vallely of Premium Alpaca and Fiona Van der Beek of Birrong Suri Alpacas. Together they volunteered their time to source, test and class the Australian suri contribution. We would also like to thank all of the Australian breeders who donated their fibre. It is very heartening to see how many breeders on both sides of the Tasman have a commitment to the future of suri.

The Australian fibre was imported in March and transferred to the scour where it was combined with the New Zealand fibre. It is now all under quarantine restrictions and must remain so until after carding.

Scouring

Scouring of the Rumpelstiltskin fibre was carried out in July. We are very appreciative of the staff at the scour who worked with us to make sure the scouring process would work. As you can imagine a scour that puts through 500 kg per 6 minutes had to be slowed right down to accommodate our small batch of suri.

An interesting development at the scour was that the length of the fibre was of huge importance. Every bag of fibre was thoroughly inspected to make sure it was not too



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long. Long fibre tangles in the scour and would not be allowed through the machinery. We were very glad we had been so strict on the length specification at classing as this may have bought the whole project to a standstill.

The scour was generally happy with how the suri when through, although it is not without its intricacies. The comments were that it was such a little pile of fibre for its weight and it did clump together a bit. Happily for us they are willing to continue to work with us in the future and we are yet again reminded about how important it is to develop good relationships.

Next step - Spinning

Now we have the fibre scoured we are onto the next step – carding, combing and gilling into tops then spinning to yarn. Sadly for New Zealand much of the specialized equipment for these processes has been sold overseas or as scrap metal. The consultants we have been working with have provided information on where they believed the machinery and expertise may remain in the country and we made contact and/or visited those that might have been in a position to process suri for the Rumplestiltskin project. The last months have been rather like a very turbulent roller coaster ride...with a good many hopeful highs and as many deep troughs! Lining up all the components we require, worsted carding and combing and spinning frames able to meet our spin fineness project needs has been challenging and hard to get everything we need in the same place! The good news is, we have finally found a bright star and a mill who is keen to work with us and has the processing expertise to complete this next stage. Like the previous stages, developing good solid relationships and having people who want to work with us is worth its weight in gold.

Tips for shearing coming up

With the next shearing season nearly upon us here are some quick tips to help you maximize the value of your fleeces...

- Take your midside samples and get them tested before shearing. That way you know which fleeces you want to concentrate on and in what order.
- Organise enough help on the day so you can concentrate on collecting, sorting and labeling your fleeces properly. If you are short on helpers make an agreement with another alpaca breeder close by to help you and in return help them with their shearing.



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- Sort your herd before shearing so you can shear the best quality first. This cuts down on contamination. For example shear all whites first, best to worst, clean shearing area thoroughly, then move onto fawns... If you are concentrating on black you might want to start with the best blacks first.
- Clean as many contaminants out of the fleece before shearing as possible.
- Make sure you have suitable bags to store each fleece in. We recommend paper bags with a large opening. These allow you to put the whole fleece into the bag without disturbing it too much – making it much easier to finish skirting and classing later.
- Put the blanket in one bag and the neck in another. Keep separate and label with an ID of the animal, neck or blanket and the **date**. Legs and belly can be combined in a seconds bin.
- Skirt as well as you can quickly on the floor before bagging. Remove any daggs or seconds.
- Store fleeces in a dry, clean area until classing and baling.
- After shearing have a think about what worked well and what you need to change for next year to make shearing even better. Write it down.

Next collection days

We are planning on having more classing and collection days after this year shearing. Probably early in 2014 so keep an eye out for dates and locations.

Alpaca 2013

Phillipa presented at the Alpaca 2013 World Alpaca Conference so so we hope you got along to see her and get the latest update on how things are going with Rumpelstiltskin.

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