

# Rumpelstiltskin

## Spinning suri fibre into gold

# Suri Shearing Protocol

*Last edited 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2014*

## Introduction

This protocol has been developed as a guide for suri fibre producers as part of the Rumpelstiltskin Project. It draws on the experience of suri farmers and shearers along with observations from the Rumpelstiltskin project.

The aim is to guide farmers to get the maximum value from their suri fleece harvest every year and ensure a quality standard that will enhance the industries reputation.

The scope of this protocol is for shearing fleeces destined for commercial processing and acknowledges that specifications and procedures may be different for hand, craft, or mini-mill processing.

## Suri Fibre Characteristics Important to Maximising Value

Before shearing it is important to understand the traits and characteristics of suri fibre and their impact on the value of the fleece. Shearing and skirting should aim to protect the positive and minimise or eliminate the negative.

### **Fineness and uniformity of micron.**

- The finer the fleece the more valuable as the more luxurious it will feel and the more expensive the final product can be.
- More uniform fleeces have a narrow range of micron creating a smoother feel which is highly valued in the end product.
- The fineness is measured by the average micron of a sample and the uniformity by the standard deviation (SD) of the micron sample.
- Best practice is to take samples from across the blanket area of the fleece to ensure consistency. Any area where the fibre average changes to another micron band needs to be skirted out from the fleece, and reduce the yield thus return.

### **Strong primary fibre (guard hair).**

- Areas of the blanket with strong primary fibres need to be removed as these fibres will create prickles in the final product reducing its value.

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### **Suri style – Lustre, handle and nourishment.**

- Suri is prized for its natural luster which enhances the look and feel of the final product. Fleeces that are dull or chalky will reduce the value of the bale.

### **Length at shearing.**

- For processing fleece must be between 80mm to 140mm.
- Fibre longer than 140mm will cause the bale to be rejected from scouring and spinning.
- Shorter fibres will fall out during processing adding the waste and processing costs.

### **Contamination.**

- Contamination can be from vegetation, insects, other fleece, or other non biodegradables and can happen in the paddock, during shearing or fleece storage.
- Excessive contamination in the fleece that cannot be skirted out will cause it to be downgraded.

### **Uniformity of colour.**

- Classed bales are for a solid colour so variations in colour within a fleece will result in it being downgraded to a mixed colour grade.

### **Management to control characteristics.**

Fineness, uniformity, guard hair, colour, and suri style characteristics are primary controlled by breeding although health and nutrition can play a part in how they are exhibited.

Length at shearing and contamination are primary controlled by the farm management practices.

## **Timing of Shearing**

### **Primary consideration**

- Time shearing for optimal fleece length of 80mm to 140mm. For younger stock this may be on a rotation less than 12 months.

### **Secondary considerations**

- Minimise vegetation contamination by avoiding times of the year when grass or trees producing seed, or shedding leaves and needles.
- Dry weather so fleeces are not stored wet.
- Warmer weather or shedding animals as more susceptible to cold for the week after shearing.

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### Shearers Role

The shearer should;

- Provide clean equipment that is fit for the purpose.
- Use a method that takes the blanket fleece first so that it is free from contamination with seconds fibre. Then takes the neck fibre in a way that it can be kept free of the brisket and other seconds fibre.
- Communicate clearly with handlers and skirter and sweepers so that everybody understands their role and creates a safe environment to work.
- Put human and animal safety first.

### Farm/Producer Role

The farm manager or producer should;

- Ensure alpacas are presented clean and dry for shearing. Before shearing keep alpaca in clean paddocks. Clean as many contaminants out of the fleece before shearing as possible.
- Sort alpacas by colour and quality. 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 etc.
- Make sure there are enough people for each job so no one is over worked. People make mistakes and quality suffers when people are tired.
- Make sure everyone knows their role and understands the shearers workflow.
- Put human and animal safety first.

### Individual Roles

Alpaca Handlers

- Pen alpacas ready for shearing.
- Bring alpacas to shearing station and restrain
- Release alpacas after shearing to pen or paddock.

Alpaca Head Handler

- Hold head of alpaca so it does not struggle to get up.
- Hand head to shearer and take back when finished.
- Stay alert to where shearer is.

Floor Skirter

- Keep the blanket in one piece as it comes off the animal.
- Skirt out any obvious seconds and contaminated fleece eg daggs urine stain.
- If bagging individual fleeces – make sure correctly ID'ed and stored safe from contamination.

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- If baling – ensure that fleece is transported to skirting table in one piece.
- Make sure the neck is separated from the brisket. Keep separate from blanket as neck fleece is shorter in length.

### Table Skirter

- Grade fleece to specification.
- Take samples

### Sweepers

- Sweep up seconds fibre and bag in appropriate colour.
- Separate dirty or daggy fleece for rubbish.
- Clean down shearing pad between animals.

## After Shearing

Once shearing is finished make sure fibre bags or bales are stored in a clean and dry environment until ready for transporting to processing.

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### Practical Tips for Shearing

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.
- 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.