

# Wisteria Suri Ranch- FAQ



## **1. I know I want to get into the Alpaca Business. Where do I start?**

### **Start with a Business Plan**

Alpaca ranching can be a very exciting and profitable business. But as with any business, success is not automatic. Your success depends on your research, business plan, business skills, available time and resources.

The best place to start is to consider your personal goals and create a simple business plan. How much money do you have to invest in this business? What kind of ROI are you looking for? How large will your herd be? What kind of herd will you focus on? Will you have Suris or Huacayas? How quickly are you looking for income? Will you focus on seedstock or fiber animals? How do you plan to market your alpacas and their fiber? What will be your niche?

The business plan will help guide you in selecting the best foundation herd for your business. We're always happy to discuss our business so you can get an idea of where your niche might be. Feel free to call and schedule a few visits to our ranch. We welcome repeat visitors as there are many things to experience.

## **2. Can you give me a quick overview of selecting land and set-up?**

Alpacas are small acreage animals, but in many counties in Texas, you'll most likely need 10 acres to qualify for agricultural exemption. Check with your county or real estate agent. Avoid land with Johnson grass (toxic) and excessive burrs. Coastal Bermuda grass is good. There are other toxic plants you will need to watch for, but Johnson grass is common and easy to avoid. You'll be able to save on hay costs if you have a nice Coastal Bermuda pasture.

You'll need a suitable shelter for your alpacas. In Texas, you can use carport style barns in areas where it doesn't get too cold. You'll need at least two areas to begin with- one for the girls and the other for the boys. Safe fencing option includes the 5 ft. no-climb horse fences. Welded wire can also be used, but they are not as strong as the woven wire.

Create a plan before you begin construction. Herd management is significantly easier with a well thought out layout. Come see our set up and adjust to your property.

You will also want to consider your hay storage area. Hay can be a big investment, and you don't want to end up with tons of moldy hay. 24x24 covered hay barn can hold about 6 tons of hay (part of those bales are super-compressed).

### **3. What are some special considerations for alpacas in Texas?**

The summers are hot, so there are a few things you'll need to do for your alpacas. First, make sure their shelter is as cool as can be. A nice breeze can make a difference. Never run out of drinking water. Check often and have extra buckets available. You can electrolyte a few buckets of water, but it's good to give them options. Most people will spray their alpacas down with a hose. You want to cool their belly, arm/leg pits. Be careful with any puddles since they will sit in them and rot off their fleece.

Keep extra Gatorade (fruit punch flavor) on hand. If anyone looks a bit off, take their temperature and call a vet. With vet approval, you can hydrate them with 50/50 water Gatorade mix. Check on them often. Cool your males down so they don't become sterile.

Avoid summer breedings. Don't stress them out when it's hot. Do your herd management activities in the coolest hours possible. Make sure they get sheared every year in the spring before it gets too hot. If you have younger crias, make sure they stay out of the sun during the hottest hours.

### **4. What information should I ask for before considering a purchase?**

- Copy of ARI certificate
- Histogram at a year old + any others they may have
- Fiber sample from prime blanket
- Breeding status- ultrasound confirmation if bred
- Additional pictures
- Dam, sire, service sire information
- Provided guarantees (reproductive guarantee, etc.)
- Any health issues
- Show records/ ask if they will give you the ribbons with purchase

When you are ready, sign a sales contract with an option to cancel if prepurchase vet exam is unsatisfactory.

Once you purchase, you should get a copy of their health file, IgG at birth, vaccination records, worming schedule, and any feed sensitivity issues. Sudden changes in their diet can cause upsets, so ask what they have been fed. If possible, change gradually.

## 5. How do you determine price?

We price our alpacas based on quite a few different criteria. We take the following into consideration and then run comps:

- Sex
- Age
- Breeding status
- Genotype
- Phenotype
- Pedigree
- General market/economy

We like to offer a good deal since we like a good deal ourselves. After coming up with a price, we ask ourselves "Would this be a deal if we were buying?" There's something quite satisfying when you know you're getting more quality for your money.

## 6. What do I need before my alpacas arrive?

This is not meant to be a complete list as we all have different preferences and set-ups.

Here's a starter checklist:

- Fenced area- separate ones for females and weaned males
- Barn/shelter for alpacas
- Hay storage area
- Water buckets with clean water
- Hay
- Hay buckets (plastic bins work well)
- Alpaca supplements
- Supplement feeder
- Free choice minerals
- Mineral holder
- Electrolytes/Gatorade (in summer)
- Poop management system in place (big covered trash can, rake, etc.)
- Wood pellets/diatomaceous earth for poop pile
- Fly traps (in summer)
- Alpaca vet phone number
- Dr. Norm Evans' Field Manual and other books
- Vet supplies- needles, syringes, wormers, thermometer, emergency medicine (ask vet)
- Rakes for excess hay
- Halters, lead ropes, toe nail clippers
- Cria coats (winter)
- Boots for yourself (for rain and mud)
- Zip ties
- Power drill
- Extra plastic mesh
- Extra cattle panel and t-posts
- Cotton balls/rubbing alcohol
- Cutter knife (opening hay bales)
- Extra sand
- Wheelbarrow

## **7. I want to participate in shows, but we're not ready to travel yet. Can you tell me more about mail-in fleece shows?**

There are many alpaca shows you can participate in nationally without ever leaving your ranch. The AOBA website has a list of shows on their website.

Most people know about the halter shows. But there are other ways you can participate without the stress and the costs.

Mail-in fleece shows are a great way to start showing your alpacas. It's quite simple in how it works. You take the shorn fleece and prepare it for show. We can show you how. Then select your show and send it in with the paperwork and ARI certificate. After the show, you'll get a scorecard with helpful feedback and maybe a lovely ribbon.

If preparing the entire prime fleece seems overwhelming, you can participate in a 2 oz spin-off competition offered at many shows. You take 2 oz of your prime fleece and get rid of vegetative matter and second cuts. You send the fleece, photo, and paperwork to the show of your choice and you'll get a scorecard and a pretty mini-skein back. This is a great marketing item to show to your potential clients along with all your ribbons.

A few words on ribbons and what they mean as not all ribbons carry the same weight. Some shows are much more competitive, and their fourth place ribbon may carry more weight than a blue ribbon at another show. But, there is a minimum score to win a blue ribbon- so you can assume that a blue ribbon from an AOBA certified show is a third party stamp of approval. Shows offer a great marketing opportunity as well as a way to improve your breeding strategy.

## **8. Why do you specialize in Suri alpacas?**

We chose Suri alpacas for several reasons:

- Suris have an established breed standard while Huacayas don't
- Suris are extremely rare- 1% of the world and 20% of the U.S. alpaca population (Better investment?)
- Only about 580 Suris in Texas (as of September 2009)
- Unique silky lustrous fleece
- Great Suri only organization focused on advancing Suris-The Suri Network
- We thought they were absolutely gorgeous when they proned in full fleece

## **9. Why do you like Accoyo genetics?**

Accoyos were imported from a very special ranch in Peru. Don Julio Barreda had a vision and bred intensely for the ideal alpaca. They are known to be genetic powerhouses producing many champions in the U.S. Don Julio Barreda focused on shear weight, fineness, uniformity, large size, and refined elegance in his Accoyo males.

We want to use males that will give us the biggest improvement in the shortest period of time.

## **10. What do you do with alpaca fiber?**

Alpaca fiber can be spun into yarn, felted, and made into fabric. You can use raw fiber or have it processed into roving, yarn, felt batts and more at a custom mill. Some people sell their fiber and others create special products.

We show our fleeces to get the judges' feedback. After the fleeces are shown, we take it to a custom mill to process into roving or yarn. We spin the roving into yarn and knit small products. Some people make their Suri fiber into beautiful fabric and sew it into amazing products. The opportunities are limitless- and only limited by your creativity.