

WARATAH ALPACA FIBRE CO-OPERATIVE DETAILED GUIDELINES FOR FLEECE PREPARATION

Although the Co-op has been established primarily for its members, it is committed to the development of the NSW and Australian alpaca fibre industry, supporting quality, sustainable production and increasing supply to purchasers in all colours and classes. The Co-op will therefore accept all alpaca fleece delivered to the designated collection points by any grower of alpaca fleece. Further details can be found at waratahalpacafibre.com.au.

The extent to which these guidelines are followed together with the resulting quality of delivered fleece will influence the price paid by the Co-op to the grower.

FLEECE PREPARATION – paddock conditions, testing, colour sorting, shedding overnight, fleece bags and market requirements.

Paddock Conditions:

The quality of fleece can often depend on factors out in the paddock during the year prior to shearing. A tender fleece can reduce its value by limiting its use and contaminants such as vegetable matter can reduce the quantity of acceptable fleece and its value due to additional processing requirements.

Value can be added to fleece by ensuring that alpacas have adequate and consistent nutrition, are kept clean, regularly inspected, weighed and/or body scored to identify those alpacas that may be diseased or be carrying excessive parasites and treated accordingly.

Testing:

It is strongly recommended that all growers, other than those members having fleece classed by the contract classers at the time of shearing, have each alpaca mid-side tested within one month before or at shearing. If testing is done using an OFDA 2000 instrument then it is also recommended that tests be carried out with the trim high setting turned OFF. This will ensure that all fibre diameters in the tested sample are included in the results.

Colour Sorting:

Sorting alpacas according to colour prior to shearing will help to reduce colour contamination during shearing. It is recommended that shearing progress from white through to black.

Shedding and Bedding:

Check the weather forecast and shed the night or day before shearing if necessary, to avoid wet or damp fleece. Use bedding material that will minimise fleece contamination.

Fleece bags:

Clear plastic fleece bags will be required for holding the saddle fleece and smaller bags for holding the neck fleece and good pieces not included with the saddle.

Market requirements:

There are different parts of a fleece that can be sold to different buyers and for this reason it helps to know these market requirements before shearing.

The Co-op will post regular current market requirements on its web site, Facebook page and via email.

SHEARING – white through to black, saddle first, cross-contamination, bagging fleece.

Colour contamination:

Check that the shearer has cleaned his gear of fleece from a previous shearing before starting to shear to prevent the possibility of colour contamination.

When shearing a coloured herd, it is recommended that shearing starts with the lightest colour and progresses through to the darkest.

Keep the shearing area clean between each colour to avoid colour contamination.

Saddle first:

It is recommended that saddle fleece be shorn first and removed from the shearing area for skirting while the rest of the alpaca is being shorn.

Neck fleece followed by good pieces (if not shorn with the saddle) should ideally be shorn next and placed into separate smaller bags. These should then be added to the fleece bag containing the skirted saddle fleece.

Cross contamination:

Every effort should be made during shearing to avoid cross-contamination of colours, coarse fibres, vegetable matter and stained fleece.

Any odd coloured spots or patches should be removed at shearing and not included in the bagged fleece.

Bagging fleece:

Depending on the number of alpacas being shorn and the extent of assistance during shearing it may not always be possible to thoroughly skirt each fleece after being shorn and it will need to be bagged for final skirting later.

Each bagged fleece should include a Fleece Card containing fleece details including stud name, whether or not a cria fleece (a first fleece that still contains cria tips), whether huacaya or suri, the colour, and if available, tested mid-side micron and staple length.

Colours:

The Co-op adopts the following range of colours:

- White (WT) – white or off white with no contaminating colour
- Light Fawn (LF) – light fawn and white/off white with odd fawn/brown fibres
- Fawn (FN) – medium fawn
- Brown (BR) – dark fawn, light/medium/dark brown
- Rose Grey (RG) – light/medium/dark rose grey
- Grey (GY) – light/medium/dark grey
- Black (BK) – brown/blue black

PRE-SKIRTING PREPARATION – bins and smaller bags, scales and recording tools, completed Fleece Cards.

Bins:

Large bins such as laundry baskets are useful for holding clean skirtings and smaller bins such as tidy baskets that fit under the skirting table are useful for holding rejected heavily contaminated fleece.

Smaller bags:

These could be singlet or tidy bags for containing neck fleece and good pieces being separated from the saddle.

Scales and recording tools:

Scales and recording tools will be required for weighing skirted saddle fleece, neck fleece and good pieces.

SKIRTING – four stages.

It is recommended that skirting be carried out in 4 different stages. This will simplify the procedure and actually reduce the time taken to skirt each fleece. It will also result in optimising the quality and value of the fleece.

Stage 1 -- Checking for coarse fibre contamination and tenderness:

If the saddle has not been shorn first and the obvious coarse fibres have not been removed at shearing then there is the risk that these coarse fibres will have contaminated the rest of the fleece either before the saddle has been shorn or after it has been bagged.

Spread the fleece out on the skirting table as though it was still attached to a hide with the tip side uppermost and avoid stretching the fleece. This helps to identify the different parts of the fleece and make it quicker and easier to locate vegetable matter, stain and coarse fibres.

Check the fleece for coarse fibre contamination and if excessive the whole fleece may need to go into the skirtings/coarse fibre bin or be classed as strong or extra strong depending on the micron of the fleece. Coarse straight fibres will usually have a fibre diameter of at least 40 microns.

Next check for tenderness. This is usually caused by a sudden change in nutritional intake or as a result of disease or parasites.

The finest fibres will be next to the midline and if the fleece is tender, these fibres will be the easiest to break.

Remove a small portion of a staple by holding the fibres at the cut end. Then test for tenderness by holding the fibres at each end and flicking or tugging several times to see if the fibres break.

If they break, the location of the break will determine the fleece value depending on its useful length. This location will usually coincide with the test result for the finest point from the tip on the micron profile graph for that alpaca's mid-side sample. Mark the Fleece Card to indicate whether or not the fleece is tender.

Stage 2 -- Removing vegetable matter and other contaminants:

Remove as much of the vegetable matter as possible. The extent and nature of any remaining vegetable matter will have a significant impact on the price received. Grass seeds tend to accumulate around the head area and on the legs and belly fleece but can be distributed throughout the fleece from the alpaca rolling. Other debris tends to accumulate at the base of the neck and along the midline, particularly on younger alpacas.

If there is excessive vegetable matter throughout the fleece and it is just not possible to remove then the whole fleece may need to be discarded unless carbonising is a viable option.

Stage 3 -- Removing coarse fibres:

Any fleece with coarse fibres around the edges of the saddle needs to be removed. Once the obvious coarse fibres have gone it is then easier to spot the rest.

Any remaining fleece that has coarse straight fibres protruding from the tips of the staples may also need to be removed.

If there is uncertainty as to whether or not to remove a particular section of fleece then do the tip-test. Pull the tip fibres from a staple and check them for crimp. If most of these fibres are straight then that section may need to be removed depending on the mid-side micron. These fibres will usually have a diameter of at least 40 microns. If in doubt, take it out.

Sometimes a fleece, usually from an older alpaca, has numerous coarse straight fibres protruding from all the staples. If this is the case then the whole fleece may need to go into a coarse fibre bale, again depending on the mid-side micron. If this is over 36 microns then the fleece would be classed as extra strong.

Saddle skirtings from fleeces with mid-side microns less than 21 will command a higher price than other skirtings and can therefore be included in a higher micron bale such as strong (29-36 micron).

Finally give the whole fleece a good shaking to allow any second cuts that are under the fleece to fall through the skirting table.

Stage 4 – Pre-classing for length:

Now that the remaining fleece is sound, clean, and free of coarse fibres, it is ready to be sorted into the different fleece lengths. To do this it will be necessary to know the market requirements, otherwise it should be left for the classer to do.

The AAA Alpaca Fleece Classing Code of Practice recommends the following length categories:

- Code A: 90 – 110mm for fleece up to 20.5 micron (SU – SF), 90 – 140mm for fleece above 20.5 micron (F – XS)
- Code B: 75 – 100mm for all microns < 20.6 (SU – SF) and > 20.5 (F - XS)
- Code C: 50 – 75mm for all microns < 20.6 (SU – SF), 20.6 – 28.5 (F – M) and >28.5 (S – XS)

- Code D: less than 50mm (all short fleece with low levels of coarse fibres) for all microns < 22.6, 22.6 – 28.5, >28.5. Alternatively, to obtain bale quantity, all microns < 28.6 could be combined
- Code O: greater than 140mm (overlong) for all microns < 20.6, 20.6 – 28.5 and >28.5.

Some markets will accept different length ranges however the greater the range the more likelihood of breakages during processing and therefore the lower the price. Recent buyer demand indicates a preference for fibre lengths of 50-70 mm, 70-110mm, and 110-140mm.

There is also a demand for fleece outside this range including good pieces, neck and over long fleece with low levels of guard hair. Don't forget to weigh the saddle fleece first and then the total weight of each fleece with the smaller bags added. Record and enter the weights on the Fleece Card. If you know the weight of a fleece bag, the saddle can be weighed after it has been bagged. Most fleece bags weigh about 0.06kg.

DELIVERY TO THE CO-OP—where, how and what.

Where:

Fleece can be delivered to any of the collection points designated by the Co-op. Coolaroo's Mittagong facilities is the central collection and storage point. Other collection points in NSW are listed on the Co-op website. Interstate collection points are also being established.

How:

All fleeces that have not been classed and baled at the time of shearing are required to be individually bagged in perforated fleece bags containing the skirted saddle fleece together with separate labelled bags of neck fleece and good pieces of different lengths.

These individual fleece bags, depending on the quantity, should then either be delivered in bale bags or individually. If more than 10 bags of saddle fleece of any one colour is involved then delivery should be in bale bags or similar strong bags. Skirtings from all fleeces of the same colour can be bagged together unless there is a requirement for specific micron ranges.

What:

All fleece delivered should include a consignment sheet with grower details such as:

- Name of grower
- Property name/ herd name
- Email address
- Phone numbers
- ABN if registered for GST
- Weight of skirted saddle fleece delivered
- Total weight of fleece delivered
- Date delivered
- Name of person or entity to receive payment

- Bank details for electronic fund transfer and email address for notification of transfer

Copies of the fleece card and consignment sheet can be downloaded from the Co-op website in the Fleece section. This section also contains the current Co-op Manual that outlines delivery requirements.

JOINING THE WARATAH ALPACA FIBRE CO-OPERATIVE

Information for joining the Co-op can be found in the Corporate Section of the website. This section enables interested growers to read the Co-op Rules and the Disclosure Statement.

An Application for Membership form is also available for downloading.