08

ALPACAS
Overview

The good

- Alpacas can be a viable source of income for a small block.
- They can make great pets and are good with people.
- They can utilise low-value feed in paddocks.
- They have a soft, warm fleece that can be made into a range of products.
- Alpacas create dung areas, so don’t soil the entire paddock as other animals do.
- They’re not susceptible to flystrike or foot rot.

The bad

- Alpacas can be expensive.
- Alpacas are social creatures, so you’ll need at least two.
- They can spit, although they rarely spit at people.
- They are more susceptible to ryegrass staggers and facial eczema than other animals.

Breeds

There are two breeds of alpaca, the Huacaya and the Suri. Huacayas far outnumber Suri, making up approximately 95% of the world’s alpaca population.

Llamas and alpacas are closely related, but while alpacas are bred for their fine fleece, llamas are bred as pack animals and are larger and broader than alpacas.

For more information visit the Alpaca Association New Zealand at alpaca.org.nz
Alpaca fibre

- Alpacas produce a luxurious fleece that comes in a variety of colours, including whites, greys, browns and black.
- Alpaca fibre is renowned for its strength, soft handling and lustre. It’s often compared to fine merino and cashmere.
- A single alpaca can produce between 3kg and 5kg of fibre each year.
- With little or no natural grease, alpaca fibre is sought after for hand spinning.

Husbandry & welfare

- Alpacas can subsist on poor-quality pasture and hay. Only pregnant females require feed supplementation in winter.
- Alpacas don’t try to escape from their paddock, so no special fencing, over and above the Fencing Act 1978, is required.
- They need shearing once a year, and it’s best to use an experienced alpaca shearer.
- The front teeth of an alpaca can overgrow and may need to be trimmed.
- As alpacas only deposit dung in one area, they are less likely to get intestinal worms than other livestock.
Breeding

- Alpacas don’t have regular cycles like other farmed species, but are induced ovulators, with ovulation being stimulated by mating.
- This means they can be mated at any time of the year although mating is most successful in spring and autumn.
- Alpacas usually unpack (give birth) without trouble, so births needing assistance are rare.
- Alpacas typically unpack between 7am and 2pm. If they’re still in labour by the evening, you may need the assistance of your vet.

Common health issues

Below are some common health issues to help you figure out what’s going on with your alpacas, but you should also get advice from your local vet.

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<tr>
<th>ISSUE &amp; CAUSE</th>
<th>SYMPTOMS</th>
<th>TREATMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FACIAL ECZEMA (FE)</td>
<td>Severe sunburn and general irritation. Can result in ill-thrift, lowered milk production, low fertility, metabolic diseases and death.</td>
<td>Prevention includes minimising the ingestion of spores and feeding zinc oxide.</td>
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<td><strong>RICKETS</strong></td>
<td>Bowing of the forelegs, a reluctance to move, a hunched posture, lameness, and swollen joints.</td>
<td>Preventative treatment involves vitamin D injections starting at 8 weeks old.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PULPY KIDNEY AND TETANUS</strong></td>
<td>Pulpy kidney: sudden death and rapid decomposition. Tetanus: muscle tremors, muscle rigidity then death.</td>
<td>Seek veterinary advice. Vaccinations are available.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STAGGERS</strong></td>
<td>Slight tremor of the head and neck. Continued exposure leads to an unstable gait.</td>
<td>Replace pasture with an endophyte-resistant grass.</td>
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Alpacas are great animals for lifestyle block owners as they are friendly with people and require less care than most livestock. The downside of their social nature is that you’ll need to buy at least two of them, and they can be expensive.

Alpacas can vary significantly in value, so it pays to look at insurance options for your more expensive breeding stock.