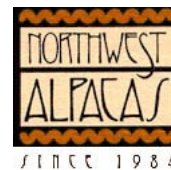




Getting Started in the Alpaca Business

By Mike Safley



Getting Started in the Alpaca Business

Becoming involved in the alpaca business can be a life changing experience. It often begins by falling in love, maybe not in the romantic sense, but almost. When people see their first alpaca or maybe just an alpaca image on TV or in a magazine, something clicks. They are intrigued. They begin to inquire, search the internet, travel to a nearby alpaca farm, and slowly, but surely, their life changes.

Soon they are dreaming of a farmhouse in the country or renovating that unused barn on the five acres behind the house. A young mother with children begins to wonder, can I really become self employed in the alpaca business? An older couple might ask, can this be what we are going to do when we retire? A professional man says to himself, can we really make a living in the alpaca business?

I have been raising alpacas for seventeen years and I think I have some answers to these questions. Alpacas.com is meant to be a resource for people who seek educated answers to the questions above. We offer help with alpaca business plans and farm plans. We help our clients use science and classic genetic breeding theory to increase their profit potential. We teach people how to select superior stock and how to market their production. Hopefully in the end people who become involved in the Northwest Alpacas Network will become successful alpaca ranchers.

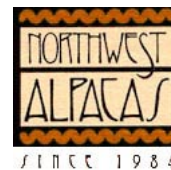
ALPACA EDUCATION

The first step down the path to discovering whether raising alpacas might be a part of your future is to educate yourself. I would recommend that anyone entering the alpaca business read my book [Alpacas: Synthesis of a Miracle](#), where you will find a contemporary history of alpacas, beginning in their South American homeland, and information on how to select and breed superior animals. There is also an excellent bibliography at the back of the book. Another excellent text is Maggie Krieger's *Secrets of the Andean Alpaca*. You can also find over 100 articles about alpacas in Northwest Alpacas [library](#). There are also a wide number of alpaca orientated websites on the internet.

If you would like to have an actual hands-on alpaca experience, call us at 503-628-3110 and schedule an appointment to visit the ranch. Once you get here we will spend as much time as you would like answering your questions, showing you what qualities to look for, and how to care for your alpacas.

One of the best ways to learn about alpacas is to attend our seminar [How to Buy, Breed, and Succeed in the Alpaca Business](#). The seminar is presented by myself and Alan Cousill who has been farming alpacas for many years in Australia where he and his wife, Jude, still own one of the largest alpaca herds downunder.

The seminar is based on the concept that alpacas are a business and, if managed correctly, can be very profitable. After spending a weekend at our seminar you will be prepared to draft a viable business plan and farm plan.



Getting Started in the Alpaca Business

ALPACA BUSINESS PLAN

An alpaca business plan should answer the following questions and contain the following elements:

1. Which alpaca breed do you intend to own, huacaya or suri, or both?
2. The identification of your market niche.
3. When do you require income from the herd?
4. How much income does your family require from the enterprise?
5. A breeding plan.
6. A farm expense budget.
7. Will you pay cash or buy on terms?
8. The [tax benefits](#) of alpaca ownership.
9. A marketing strategy.

All of these concepts are covered in great detail at our [How to Buy, Breed, and Succeed in the Alpaca Business](#) seminar. If you can not attend the seminar, call Alan at 503-628-3110 and he will help you develop your own individualized alpaca business plan.

CREATING A FARM PLAN

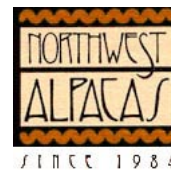
Designing a safe, well-organized plan for adding barns, fences, and accessory buildings is crucial to your success in the alpaca business. At Northwest Alpacas we have helped hundreds of people get started right.

We can give you practical advice on selecting the ideal location, the type of fences you will need, the size of gates, which type of pasture to plant, how to build effective shelter, where to place water troughs, how to select hay, layout your barn, protect against predators, and dispose of manure. About the only thing we won't do is scoop the poop. So call or email Alan today and find out how we can help you get off on the right foot.

ANIMAL SELECTION

One of the most critical decisions you will make involves selecting your breeding stock. If you learn nothing else from this article or our website, please learn how to select stock before you spend the money you have budgeted for animal acquisition.

New breeders have a unique opportunity to position themselves at the forefront of the industry by selecting animals that have superior traits. Knowledge of these traits and how to select for them is often the difference between success and failure in the alpaca business. Our [seminar](#) and the [books](#) we have recommended will go a long way toward helping you make good decisions.



Getting Started in the Alpaca Business

For instance most new purchasers come to our ranch knowing what breed and what color of animal they want to select but few are looking at several even more important issues:

- 1)What pedigree they would like to have in their purchase
- 2)To whom is the animal they are buying bred
- 3)Who will they be bred to in the future
- 4)To whom the alpacas will their purchase offspring be bred.

The answers to the above questions can be even more important than whether or not the alpacas exhibit good [fleece and conformation traits](#). At Northwest Alpacas, Alan or myself spend a lot of time educating our clients as to what they should look for in their breeding stock. You can call us anytime and start the conversation about what kind of stock will best suit your plans for the alpaca business, or check out our for [sale alpacas](#).

Whatever you do, take a little time to educate yourself before you spend your money. Remember you're going to be in the alpaca business for a long time.

MARKETING STRATEGY

At Northwest Alpacas we believe that marketing is one of the most crucial elements necessary for the success of any alpaca breeder. I can tell you with 100% certainty that if you do not let people know that you have alpacas for sale that you will not sell any.

The first step to understanding how to market alpacas is to learn: 1) who buys alpacas in the first place; 2) how buyers find out about alpacas and where they go to buy them; and 3) what sales strategies work in today's marketplace. For an in-depth discussion of this topic, you can visit our [library](#) and read one of the many articles on marketing alpacas.

NORTHWEST ALPACAS NETWORK

Another question you should ask any breeder that you buy stock from is: what are you going to do to help me after I buy these alpacas from you? At Northwest Alpacas we have an answer to that question. Everyone who buys stock from us becomes part of our network. This means we offer comprehensive after sale resources. For a detailed discussion of what it means to be part of the Northwest Alpacas Network, please visit our [library](#) and read Northwest Alpacas.com Network.

If you have read this far, I hope we have added value to your alpaca journey. A friend of mine once told me that he had figured out why he loved raising alpacas so much. When I asked why he replied that he thought "God had intended all of us to be 'shepherds.'" Another answer to the riddle of why so many people are deciding to be alpaca farmers might lie in the observation made by a famous medical doctor who developed the highly profitable "Beefmaster" brand of beef. When he was asked why he decided to be a cowboy, he replied "I have known a lot of doctors that wanted to be cowboys, but I have never known a cowboy that wanted to be a doctor."