Alpacas Are A Longstanding Global Industry

- Native to South America, alpacas have been farmed for their fleece, leather, and meat for 7,000 years.
- Today, they are now farmed in increasing numbers in countries including Canada, UK, Europe, New Zealand and South Africa.
- Australia imported its first alpacas from South America in 1989 and it is now a thriving industry. Australia has the world’s largest breeding stud with some 2,500 alpacas in the Adelaide Hills in addition to many significant large studs around the country.
- Peru has the world’s largest alpaca population while Australia has one of the largest registered breeding herds in the world with more than 150,000 animals.
- Countries throughout Asia with previously small alpaca numbers are now looking to grow their herd sizes.
- Australia has recently put protocols in place for direct export of alpacas to Taiwan and Hong Kong. Export protocols to China and Japan are near completion and export demand to other countries continues to grow.

Australia’s Role in the Growing Global Market

- Australia is a key supplier of high quality stud animals on the international market.
- Australia is leading the world in quality fleece production and our expertise is widely sought. Our position at the forefront of breed development and advanced fleece styles is the result of extensive genetic research and the development of sophisticated breeding technologies.
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- Australia continues to make advances in the global industry. Recently, the first Code of Practice for classing alpaca fibre was developed and other breeding countries around the world are now looking at the example.
- Australia is one of the few countries outside of South America that has an emerging meat market.

Australian Alpacas Around the World

- Many of the champion alpacas in the UK, Europe and New Zealand are Australian bloodlines that were purchased by breeders to improve the quality of their herds.
- Australia’s National Alpaca Show & Sale is always well attended by international breeders and investors sourcing stud stock and learning about the ongoing advances in Australian breeding programs.

Prices in the Alpaca Marketplace

- Companion animals – usually wethered males – start at around $350.
- Show quality stud animals start at around $5,000 and regularly achieve prices in excess of $60,000 depending on bloodlines and fleece quality. In 2013, there were top sales of $175,000 and $120,000 for two Australian stud champions.
- A single alpaca fleece bale recently sold for a record price of $66 per kilo. Fleece price depends on a number of quality factors including fineness, colour and suitability for processing, plus the quantity of consistent fleece available for commercial production. Standard fleece prices start from $2-$3 per kilo with higher prices paid for small quantities of unique or specialist fleece that is used by hand spinners.
- Alpaca garments and homewares – quilts, pillows, blankets and even carpet - are priced at the upper end of the market due to their exquisite feel, environmentally friendly appeal and, what many believe to be, hypoallergenic qualities. Alpaca fibre comes in a range of natural colours so there is little or no need for chemical dyes or treatments.

Women in the Alpaca Industry

- Many of Australia’s alpaca breeders are women attracted to the industry by the manageability of the animals. In comparison to other livestock, alpaca are farmed easily with minimal external input. And where men and women work together women often do much of the animal husbandry, making the breeding decisions and showing animals.
- Many women are involved in the processing of alpaca fibre using machinery and also hand carding and spinning. The manufacture of products by knitting, weaving and felting is dominated by women.
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- There are a number of significant herds being independently managed and developed by young women. These inspiring future industry leaders bring fresh skills, energy, and expertise to the industry at a time when it is on the precipice of full commercialisation.

Technology in the Alpaca Industry

- Australia is a world leader in embryo transfer (ET), which has been a highly significant advance in producing some of the world’s finest quality stud animals and fleece.
- Australia’s International Alpaca Register (IAR) is an online animal registry and incorporates a sophisticated breeding predictor. The quality and detail of this Register further enhances the value of Australian alpacas on the world market.
- An Australian designed and manufactured fibre testing machine is a world leader used in more than 30 countries.
- Early Australian research has successfully demonstrated that immunoglobulin molecules in an alpaca’s bloodstream have potential in the production of therapeutic antibodies such as snake anti-venoms. These findings are the result of research funded by the Australian Alpaca Association and the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), and could lead to a new, high value niche market for alpaca derived medical products.

Youth in the Alpaca Industry

- The Australian Alpaca Association has recently been involved in the establishment of the Australian Alpaca Youth to create a structure and forum for young breeders and teenagers interested in alpaca careers.
- Leading breeders, judges and camelid veterinary experts are contributing to the youth organisation with the motivation that alpaca plus youth equals future.
- In 2013, the RAS at the Sydney Easter Show was the first in the country to introduce a Young Paraders Event for Showmanship and Stockmanship.
- A combination of show events, workshops and youth camps give AAY members opportunities to further develop their husbandry and handling skills and knowledge in judging fleece and animal conformation.

The Future for Australian Alpacas

- The development of improved fleece processing techniques will assist in meeting the demand for high quality Australian fleece from both Huacaya and Suri alpacas.
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- Advances in Suri fibre production and processing will continue to impact. Suri is known for its lustre and ability to blend beautifully with silk to produce high quality woven materials.
- Australia’s emerging meat and hide industry will offer greater opportunities to existing alpaca farmers and new entries into the industry.
- A continuing supply of wethered alpacas will serve the sheep industry as herd guards - fearlessly warding off foxes to protect newborn lambs.
- A growing worldwide consumer interest in alpaca products will generate demand for more producers of high fashion and high quality homewares, and an increase in industries such as the high quality manufacturing of alpaca carpets and rugs.
- New export markets are forecast to open in Asia.

Who is Responsible for the Australian Alpaca Industry?

- The Australian Alpaca Association was formed in 1990 and now runs one of the most internationally advanced alpaca registers of bloodlines and breeding predictors to generate continual improvement in our herd quality and worldwide reputation. The development of standards for the emerging meat and hide is now underway.
- The Association provides tools, information & support to bring owners together for the future of alpaca farming as a fully commercial industry.

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