

**Can you pack with an alpaca?** Generally, no. The alpacas lack the bone structure to support weights much greater than their own natural body weight. A well-tempered alpaca might tolerate a small day-pack on its back for a short time, but this might damage the animal's fiber. For back-packing, their much larger cousin, the llama, would be much better suited.

**How are alpacas different than Llamas?** While both are members of the camel (or camelid) family, they are distinctly different animals. They are cousins of the Llama. They are about one-third the size of a Llama. Alpacas weigh in the range of 125-145 lbs. Some animals may reach 170 lbs. Their ears and muzzle are shorter. Alpacas have more fleece coverage, especially on their legs.

**Are alpacas dangerous?** Absolutely not! They are safe and pleasant to be around. They do not bite or butt, and do not have the teeth, horns, hooves, or claws to do serious injury. Occasionally, an alpaca will kick with its hind legs (especially if approached or touched from the rear), but the soft, padded feet usually do little more than just "get your attention."

**How do you transport an alpaca?** If traveling for short distances, they can be transported inside a mini-van. The animals usually will "cush" (sit down) and very rarely have "accidents" inside the vehicle. Longer distances generally require transport in a horse or livestock trailer.

**So what do you do with these animals?** They produce a soft and luxurious fleece, comparable to cashmere, which is turned into a wide array of products from teddy bears to garments to felt. The fleece itself is known globally for its fineness, softness, light weight, durability, excellent thermal qualities, and luster. Additionally, alpacas represent an excellent investment and income-generating potential. Many alpaca breeders rely on the sale of their animals and finished goods for a large part (or sole source) of their income.

**How much acreage does it take to raise alpacas?** Because the animals are so environmentally-friendly, you can usually raise about five to ten alpacas per acre, depending on terrain, rain/snowfall amounts, availability of pasture, etc.

**Care?** They are small and easy livestock to maintain. They should have basic shelter and protection from heat and fowl weather. They do not challenge fences. Being livestock, however, they do require certain vaccinations and must be on an anti-parasitic control program. Additionally, their toenails need to be trimmed every couple of months and their fleeces sheared off once a year.

**What do they eat?** The primary thing alpacas eat is plain grass or hay. Alfalfa is discouraged or fed only sparingly, as it has a high protein content that can be unhealthy for the alpacas. One to one-and-a-half, 60-pound bales of hay will usually feed between 20 to 25 alpacas each day. Most alpaca owners give their animals some type of supplemental grain, especially in the winter. Some owners also give their animals' food pellets as a nutritional supplement or training reward. Additionally, all alpacas require access to free-choice salts and trace minerals.

**Do they spit?** All members of the camel family use spitting as a means of communication. The main time you'll see this around the feeding trough, when the animals become very possessive about what they consider to be "their food." It is also an aggressive behavior that you may observe if two alpacas are fighting. But it is rare that an alpaca would spit on a human on purpose (although humans sometimes get caught in the cross-fire!).

**How long do they live?** Truth is, we're not really sure. In South America, they can live for about 15-20 years. But the alpacas were only recently brought to North America (significant numbers were first imported in 1984), so we don't have enough data yet to know how long they will live under the conditions found here. We hope they will live at least twenty years and perhaps significantly longer.

**What are the veterinary costs?** All of the following costs are from my own animal experiences so far...using my local veterinarian. Your costs will differ depending on the area, numbers of medication, and your specific

veterinarian. Use these numbers as a reference only. We also give the shots ourselves as most alpaca owners do. If you are uncomfortable, please have your vet provide professional assistance, most vets are glad to show you how to give shots. Our farm visit cost is \$30.00 per trip; yours will vary depending on the vet and reference to the veterinarian clinic. A large animal veterinarian will be providing this service.

All alpacas need a yearly CD/T shot and multiple de-worming shots. The CD/T shot per animal costs \$5.00 plus the farm call if you have a vet do it for you. You can purchase the CD/T from the vet, or livestock catalog along with needles and syringes or have the vet dispense them for you to pickup. The de-worming shots consist of injection (IM) Ivermectin or Dectomax, or Ivermec once per month and an oral dose of Panacur. The Ivermec costs \$2.00 dispensed by the veterinarian.

If you have investment animals you will have Ultrasounds to confirm pregnancies and blood drawn for blood typing tests (DNA analysis). Ultrasounds or palp test will cost \$15-35.00 per animal and possibly a one-time equipment fee of \$15. The blood draw will be \$10 per animal. See ARI questions for registration costs.

**ARI registration fees?** The Alpaca Registry has been established to help ensure accurate records and has a state-of-the-art system to document bloodlines. Alpacas must be blood typed in order to be registered. Virtually every alpaca in the U.S. is registered. See the ARI web site for more [Alpaca Registry](#) Costs is \$15 plus \$39 for DNA testing per animal.

**What is involved in shearing?** The main goal in shearing is to minimize stress. This process will put some stress on animals of all types. You also want to avoid second cuts. There are two basic methods for shearing alpacas: lying down or prostrate position using restraints or on a shearing table, or standing position. Use the standing position only when the alpaca is halter-trained. We hire someone to shear our animals; use the lying position with electric shears. The cost is \$25 per animal.

**What is the best age to buy an alpaca?** Alpacas can be sold at any age, but little ones are not separated until they have been weaned which is around five to six months of age.

**Do they get lonely for their own kind?** Yes they do, always have more than one, at least two. They are herd animals and feel safe in numbers. Consider purchasing a gelded male for companion if you only have one animal.

**How is their stress level?** You want to minimize their stress. Stress can possibly affect their fiber by making it brittle. They do handle stress very well. Situations to avoid are stray dogs, fence to keep strays out.

**How strong is the market for alpacas?** Currently the market is strong; there are many new breeders in the industry. There are alpacas in all fifty states. You can get the growth data per state, from the [AOBA](#) web site. As you understand the many different aspects in owning alpacas, hopefully that will help understand the market. The market has been restricted by lack of supply and it will continue because alpacas reproduce slowly, many breeders retain their offspring to build their herds, embryo transplant is not feasible, and the U.S. alpaca registry is closed to further importations.

**Marketing Venues?** Marketing alpacas for the small breeder can be challenging because they do not have the selection as the larger farms. To be successful, you must collaborate with other breeders to maximize the exposure and minimize the costs. Many small breeders will host activities together, such as shearing dates, farm open houses, or sponsor activities together. There are "loosely knit" groups throughout the country that organize activities together.

In New England we have the New England Alpaca and Breeder Association. NEAOBA.

Nationally, AOBA sponsors events around the country as well as the national event held every year. Join AOBA and regional organizations to help market your alpacas.

**What is the average return on investment?** The return rates vary depending on quality of animals, sex of offspring, price of fleece and whether you grow your herd or keep it flat. A good starting point will be to review the "Financial aspects of Alpaca ownership" brochure through AOBA.

Getting realistic numbers from experienced breeders will be difficult because they will be required to disclose financial records. They may also not do detailed financial analysis of their revenues and expenses on regular bases. I can not stress how important this is in order to be a successful business owner.

Here's some simple (example) numbers to work with. For fiber animals, your revenue will be the wool that is sold. If you purchase the animal for \$1,500 and sell the fiber for \$500 for 33% annual return, you would also figure in the expense of hay and vaccinations which would be \$60 per animal per year. You could expect an annual return of around 30% that just for a fiber or pet quality animal.

For investment livestock with the expectations of selling the offspring, a \$20,000 pregnant female will have the cria within a year, if it is a female; you will sell it for \$20,000 at two years of age, which will also be bred, that's 50% annual return. If it's a male and you did not initially buy quality animals, then you sell it for \$1,500 for 8% return which is not bad. If it's a quality male sold as a herdsire for \$15,000 then its 35% return over a two year period.

The best part about any of these financial scenarios is that you can enjoy your investment while it's making you money. That's why alpacas are called the huggable investment.

**What is included in the business plan?** The business plan will be one of the most important references and documents to maintain a successful business. I have a business plan. The two most important steps are the goals and five year objectives as well as the financial analysis over that period of time. You need clear objectives and a strategy for achieving success. You may experience uncontrollable results such as having males when you want to grow your herd, this will require a change in strategy, buy more females. The financial analysis will help you in calculating returns and financial success. Review the business plan annually to make adjust strategy.

**What is the name of a good book on alpacas?** There are several good books written about alpacas. The ones we would recommend for beginners:

- Caring for Llamas and Alpacas - A Health Management Guide, Clare Hoffman, DVM and Ingrid Asmus \$25
- Llama and Alpaca Neonatal Care, Bradford B. Smith, DVM PhD, Karen I. Timm, DVM, PhD, Patrick O. Long, DVM \$45
- Llama \* Alpaca Field Manual - Veterinary, C. Norman Evans, DVM \$85
- Alpacas - A Common Sense Approach, Julie Musgrove \$25

**Where do I get supplies for my alpaca?** Locate a good farm store in your area for general supplies such as buckets, feed and the various items to get your facilities in order. Order a catalog from Useful Llama and Alpaca at [www.usefulalpacaitems.com](http://www.usefulalpacaitems.com) they have halters, toenails clippers, books, blankets, almost everything you will need for managing your animals. We purchase our feed from Blue Seal Feeds and Needs in Concord, NH.