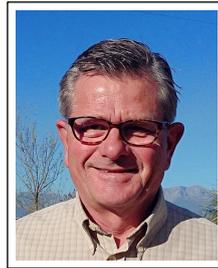


HOW TO START AN ALPACA FARM

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How I started my Alpaca Farm

My journey began when I toured South America and was introduced to alpacas in Peru in 1998. This led to internet research, visits to leading breeders and attending seminars in the USA, Canada, UK and Australia ending up importing the South Africa's foundation herd of 60 alpacas in 2000. African Alpacas was born and has facilitated the further imports of over 260 select alpacas from Australia and Chile.

As a retired dentist with no livestock farming experience, I had to fast track my learning curve: developing a farm infrastructure with fencing, shelters, connecting pathways, supplying drinking water to camps, security; animal husbandry, veterinary issues, birthing and breeding; shearing, fibre management and sales; animal nutrition .. the list is endless.

I have no regrets in following this new path in my life. I have derived enormous pleasure from working with these endearing animals. My manager of over 10 years standing, At Schlebusch, must share in the success of the venture. He offers shearing services to other breeders in the W Cape and support and advice to 'newbies' that call.

My advice to those looking to embark on alpaca farming:

- Visit various breeders to learn about alpacas: their conformation and breed standards, genetics and better bloodlines, assessing fibre, their breeding history and birthing dates, look at herdsires used in the herd etc
- Purchase alpacas according to your budget. Obviously you will fast forward herd numbers by starting with a group of pregnant females. Also consider cheaper weanling females. If you are not near a large breeder, it is recommended to purchase your own male.
- We all strive towards herd improvement. It pays to start with the best foundation herd, even if it costs more. Buyers today are better informed on quality – the progeny you sell will realise higher prices. We have much improved our herd since the original Chilean imports.
- Arrange your farm into sufficient camps that allow for rotation of grazing and able to accommodate the different groups. Our groups are: main herd pregnant or yearling females not yet ready for mating, those in the breeding program, herdsires and young males, weanlings, high care group (needing special veterinary care or extra nutritional requirements), terminally pregnant group.
- Establish a good relationship with your vet and breeders in your area. Both At and I are always available to offer advice (from my 17 year's experience).

Gavin