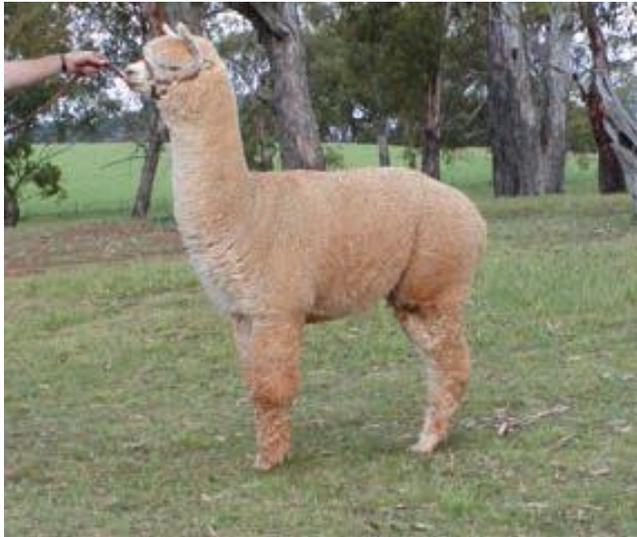


Alpacas for Africa

A pioneering step in South African farming was taken in 2000 when the first alpacas arrived on Western Cape soil. Since then, the alpaca industry has evolved into a fast growing one.

Originating from South America, alpacas are a domesticated member of the camel family. There are two breed types – the huacaya and the suri. The huacaya has thick, soft fleece with good crimp which grows perpendicularly from the body; the prized suri is distinguished by long, silky, pencil-like locks, resembling dreadlocks.



Huacaya



Suri

Fibres of both types are considered luxury fibres in the textile trade because of their unique qualities and 22 natural colours. Being hypoallergenic, lower micron products can be worn against the skin; home interior and other products are created from the higher microns. Royal Baby Alpaca fibre comes from the cria's (Spanish for baby) first shearing which is sensually soft and blissfully luxurious.

Besides the natural gift of gorgeous wool they provide, alpacas are easy to care for as they eat less than other farm animals - mainly grasses; they can tolerate harsh climatic conditions; they are environmentally friendly as do not damage terrain with their padded feet and their faeces can be used for compost for fertilizer. Plus they are intelligent with interesting characters!

Being a minority animal fibre-producing group in South Africa (merino being the largest), the alpaca breeders have privately funded and forged their own path in establishing fibre processing ventures, marketing campaigns and genetic improvement training programmes with overseas advisors. Continuous efforts are being made to engage with other interested organizations locally and overseas to uplift knowledge of breeders, local public and business organizations.

A Belfast mini-mill imported from Canada, together with a large carding machine dedicated to alpaca fibre processing, is located on a private farm in the Western Cape which provides invaluable service to local breeders.

In a country where work creation is vital, jobs have been created within alpaca farming communities by training skills such as spinning, weaving and felting as well as those engaged in the milling process and, of course, the animal husbandry itself. With around 4000 animals comprising the national herd, some South African breeders are using the alpaca's extraordinarily luxurious fibre in the manufacture of high end, handmade fashion knitwear, baby and toddler clothing and beautiful woven accessories.



The alpaca is a complementary animal to the other well-established wool fibre groups in South Africa - merino, angora/mohair to name a few. Alpaca fibre has the potential to complement this country's wool production through the recognition, vision, support and courage of breeders, farmers and other wool-producing organizations.

Full article can be viewed on South African Alpaca Breeders Society's website - www.alpacasociety.co.za

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