

Pasture Management

Preventing fleece contamination is much more efficient and less costly than spending hours skirting and cleaning your fleeces, or having a processor declare it to be unusable. Having a clean environment and healthy pastures is the first step in creating a clean and valuable fleece.

Keeping Pastures Healthy

- Rotate pasture grazing when possible to prevent overgrazing, soil compaction and to allow regrowth of pasture grass.
- Test the soil and apply any required nutrients. Contact your local Extension Office for a soil testing kit.
- Fertilize as necessary.
- Control weeds before they get out of hand.

Weed Control/Eradication

Weeds tend to flourish when the soil becomes compacted or no longer has adequate nutrients to sustain pasture grasses. Be aware what types of weeds are invading your premises. Your local Extension office is a valuable resource in identifying weeds and offering weed control solutions.

Most malignant weeds are annuals and can be reduced or eliminated entirely by mowing. Biennials may take two or three seasons of mowing.

If you catch a weed infestation before it gets out of hand, you may be able to eliminate it by chopping, digging or spot-treating with an organic compound such as agricultural strength (20%) vinegar or a solution such as Burn-Out (clove oil compound). These solutions can be costly, so are generally only practical for small areas.

In severe cases, you may need a specific chemical weed killer. Some weed killers need a license to purchase and apply. Your local Extension office can assist you in obtaining the necessary license. Be vigilant, not all agents are aware of toxin sensitivities of alpacas. Alpacas are extremely sensitive to 2-4-D.

Pasture Contaminants

Weeds, grasses even wildflowers can have spikes, burrs or sticky leaves are easily embedded in an alpaca's fleece. Many are virtually impossible to remove. Below is a list of common weeds, wildflowers and grasses that may contaminate pastures.

- Beggar-ticks
- Bur-clover
- Bur-grass
- Burdock
- Cocklebur
- Devil's claw
- Dock
- Foxtail
- Hedge parsley
- Horehound
- Sand-bur
- Stick-tights
- Teasel
- Thistle

Each region of the United States has pasture contaminants that are specific to that region. For a help identifying weeds in your area, contact your local Extension office.

US Alpaca Fiber Council

Participating organizations: Alpaca Coalition of America (ACOA), Alpaca Fiber Cooperative of North America (AFCNA), Alpaca Owners Association, Inc. (AOA), Artisan Mill Network, New England Alpaca Fiber Pool (NEAFP), Natural Fiber Producers (NFP), Sorting, Grading, Classing (SGC) and Suri Network.

Website: www.AlpacaFiberCouncil.org



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Recommendations, Code of Practice & Basic Guidelines for

Fiber Contamination

Environmental Factors

Pasture Management



www.AlpacaFiberCouncil.org

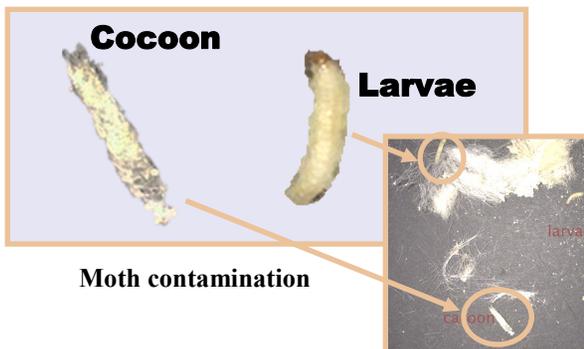
Basic Guidelines

Having a fleece that is clean and free of debris and contaminants increases the usability and maximizes the value of your fleece harvest.

Contaminated fleeces result in a greater processing loss resulting in a downgrade or rejection of your fleece. One contaminated fleece can downgrade an entire bale of clean fiber.

Code of practice

- Test for brittleness by snapping several randomly chosen locks, and check for tender tips that are easily broken or pulled apart. A tender fleece is not suitable for commercial processing.
- Start with a clean environment. Keep your barn and pastures free of debris, malignant weeds, sand, ash, and other contaminants.
- It is highly recommended that huacaya crias be shorn, assuming this can occur in time for regrowth prior to the onset of cold weather. Cria shearing will ensure the usability of the animal's first clip the subsequent year.
- Clean your barn and any enclosures where your alpacas may be confined to remove dung and discarded hay.
- Top your hay feeders with wire covers or locate them so that waste cannot drop onto alpacas to avoid a buildup of debris along the neck and topline.
- Coating may be an option where practical.



Moth contamination

Fiber Contamination

Dust, sand and similar contaminants that do not adhere to the fibers are easily removed during processing and will not devalue a fleece. Remove as much as possible.

- Dust
- Mud
- Sand
- Dung

Some contaminants will directly and permanently affect the hand of the fleece resulting in a downgrade of its value.

- Limestone
- Bedding materials intended to dry or absorb
- Commercial desiccants
- Clay

Spot contaminants that permanently stain the fiber should be removed from the fleece.

- Urine stains
- Berries
- Sweat
- Clay
- Other stains

Contaminates throughout the fleece that are difficult to remove during processing will downgrade the value of the fleece. Severe contamination could cause rejection of the entire fleece.

- Hay seed heads
- Straw
- Cardboard bedding
- Wood pellets
- Polypropylene
- Second cuts from shearing
- Skin tags
- Clay

Fleeces with parasite contamination such as moths will contaminate other fleeces and should be destroyed.

- Mites
- Moths

Environmental Factors

The environment can affect fiber production in several ways. Managing your alpacas' environment will improve the quality of your fleece harvest.

Nutrition

Proper nutrition is an important aspect in fiber production. Poor nutrition contributes to a tender fleece and stress breaks along the staple or lock.

Stress

Stress of the alpaca may directly affect the health of the fiber and may cause weak areas that could break during processing. Check for tender areas by gently pulling the staple at each end to see if it breaks.

Common causes of stress include:

- Heat
- Pregnancy
- Nursing
- Weaning
- Illness
- Parasites
- Poor nutrition

Weather

Exposure to a hot, direct sun may cause discoloration of dark fibers. The tips may become dry and brittle and break during processing. Cotting (felting) is caused when fibers become wet and then agitated.

Pasture

Clean, fertile pastures promote clean fiber, healthy alpacas and eliminate many of the challenges of fiber contamination.

Common causes of problem pastures:

- Over-grazing
- Drought
- Compaction of soil
- Inadequate soil nutrition

As grasses decline, weeds take over the empty spaces. If you find your pastures filling up with weeds, have your soil tested and apply whatever amendments are needed to restore soil health.