

SHOW TIME!

By Ian & Barry Prokop | Alpaca Vista Suris

When is a good time to prepare for alpaca shows? The obvious answer is long before you attend a show for the first time. Another good time is after returning from a show to reflect on what worked and what didn't. Say How about the Summerside?

Picking your show string of alpacas and deciding on which shows to attend are usually the first decisions alpaca owners need to make. How many shows should I go to? Should I go to larger shows or smaller, more local shows? How many alpacas should I take? All of these are good questions that don't have an easy answer since everybody's show comfort level and budgets are unique. However, at some point, your decision will be made and then it is time to decide what to take to the show and how you want to present your farm.

Going to alpaca shows serves a dual purpose. First, they are an opportunity for you to showcase your alpacas in front of a judge so that you can get a realistic appraisal of the quality of your herd. Second, it allows you to market your farm to other alpaca farm owners and the public.

ADVANCE PREPARATION

With that in mind, these are the things we do in preparation for going to a show:

Register early — Often this can get you a better stall placement since many shows assign stalls based on a "first come first serve" basis. Registering late may likely get you stalls in a less than desirable location, or worse, may result in getting turned away from the show because of limited space. We use a calendar to highlight the alpaca shows that we are planning to attend for the next year. Two to three months prior to the



a good idea to have an adequate supply of business cards with you at the shows.

Display Stall — All alpaca owners must rent stall space for their alpacas but it is optional to rent what is called a display stall. This stall provides you the opportunity to market and

showcase your farm. A typical display stall would include tables, chairs, banners, literature stands, and other marketing material.

Show Logistics — How are you going to get to the show and where are you going to stay? If it is a popular show, and many of them seem to be getting bigger every year, then reserving a hotel early is essential. You can check with the show website to find nearby accommodations; frequently blocks of rooms have been set aside at a discount rate for the show. You should map out your route to the show to insure that you leave yourself enough time to get there in time for registration.

Alpaca Transportation — Once you figure out how many alpacas you are going to bring to the show, you need to determine if you have the means to get them there on your own or if you will have to hire a transporter. One year we were able to share space in another farm's trailer and then drive together to the show.

Health Requirements — Certificates of Veterinary Inspection (CVI) filled out by your veterinarian are required for all shows. In addition, each state where the show is held has its own requirements both as to the tests and the dates for which the tests are valid. As of this writing, AOBA requires all alpacas be tested for negative BVD, which typically takes a week to 10 days to process. If your alpacas are going to several shows and are going to be away from your home for an extended period of time, then you may need to get veterinary tests along the way.

Alpaca Sitter — Most shows are held over weekends but have alpaca check-in on Thursdays or Fridays depending on the size of the show. Therefore, unless it is a local show, you will be at the show for several days and like most small farms we do not have the luxury of a ranch manager. So we use an alpaca sitter who cares for our alpacas and our house while we are away.

match the show halter and leads to the color of the alpaca.

Medical Kit - We duplicate our farm medical kit and take it on the road with us. You don't know what you will need or when you will need it.

Clean-Up Gear - Poop scooper and rake, plastic garbage bags, string/cord are all great additions to your show luggage. You can get light use scoopers and rakes that are more compact and easy to hide under your show table.

Grooming Tools — Grooming for alpaca shows is limited to the removal of vegetable matter and dung. Any enhancement of the fleece/lock structure is strictly prohibited. Therefore, we have a wand that helps to remove some of the vegetable matter. We also make sure we check under the alpaca's tail for dried dung — if we need to we carefully cut this dung off. Because we own Suris we are able to use a hose and sprayer to remove dung or vegetable matter from their legs.

Fans & Electric Cords - The fans are used mostly for Huacayas whose fiber seems to wilt from the humidity if they are not cooled off. We rarely use fans at shows for our Suris.

Bio-Security Measures — A good idea is to bring mats to place on the outside of your alpaca stalls; we soak them with a disinfectant called Virkon and require everyone who enters the stall to wipe their feet on the mat. We also hang cloth panels over the metal stall panels to discourage our alpacas from touching noses with alpacas from other farms.

MARKETING MATERIALS

These are some of the things we bring to shows to promote our alpacas and our farm:

Sales Lists - A brochure of alpacas for sale and herdsire information. We also have alpaca profiles for the stall panels — we print a picture, ARI certificate and pertinent information for each alpaca, encase it in a plastic folder and hang it from the alpaca stall panel.

Banners & Signs — Banner and signs are a great way to showcase the farm and can be positioned in your display booth or alpaca stall.

Fleece samples — If you have alpacas for sale that are not attending the show, fleece samples are a good way, in addition to pictures, to show the quality of the alpaca and their fleece. Package fleece samples, after your spring shearing, to bring

AND DON'T FORGET ...

There are many items that you should have at the show that will make the event more enjoyable:

Show ring attire — Nothing is worse than getting to the show and finding that your attire is dirty, too informal or just plain inappropriate. Logos and clothing that ID your farm are not allowed in the show ring. Also, open-toed or open-heeled shoes, sandals and bare feet are prohibited. Handlers are to be clean, neat and conservative. Either dark pants or skirts can be worn with white/light shirts or blouses. Overall appearance of the alpaca and handler may count as much as 25 points in the show ring (see appendix D of AOBA show rules).

Notebook for reminders — At the show, you will be seeing many things for the first time and meeting many new people. It is hard to remember everything when so much is going on. A pocket notebook is one way to remember all of the details and requests once you are back home.

Camera — Taking pictures of the show, your stalls, display booth and other alpacas is a way to have a lasting memory, especially if you win a ribbon. The pictures can also be used for your web site, articles and advertisements.

Folding Display Ladder — Depending on which you are setting up your display stall, you may need to reach high places. Having all of the equipment that you need at hand is easier and less frustrating. It also reduces the risk of injury!

Cooler — Complete with bottled water and snacks are a way to stay close to your stall; nourishing food at the shows can be very limited.

Cell phones — Who are you going to call when you win or if you need to attend to farm business? Make sure that you also bring your charger as well. Also remember to turn off the cell phone while you are in the show ring.

People Medical Kit — Aspirin is sometimes needed as well as regular medications. Since you are going to prepare a medical kit for your alpacas, why not prepare yourself a medical kit as well.

Contact List - You should have phone numbers of vets and hometown farm support in case something goes wrong on the farm while you are at the show. Also, a good idea is to leave the same list for your alpaca sitter!

Emergency stuff — In the event that you are transporting your own alpacas, it is always wise to think about what would happen if you broke down. You should think about joining AAA and make sure you are carrying orange vests, breakdown signs, etc.



what shows they are going to. See if they are open to seeing some of your alpacas to the show along with theirs. In an upcoming show, we are going to be taking an alpaca from another farm to show because we have an open space and they can't make the show. They will register their alpaca for the show and indicate that the alpaca will be stalled in our stall space. What a great way to get your alpaca shown and get introduced to the thrills of showing your alpacas!

show date we contact the show superintendents or affiliate to put us on a mailing list notifying us of when registration opens. If that is not possible, we keep a close watch on when a show's website opens its doors for registration.

Is the show a composite, shorn or full fleece show — This may determine when you schedule your shearing and which alpacas you can take to shows. The rules do change from year to year, so make sure you keep abreast of any changes in the rules. In any case, the health of your alpaca is much more important than whether you show or not.

Register your crias early — All your alpacas that you plan to show must be registered and microchipped. These two requirements can be done far in advance of attending any show --- typically we microchip and register a cria about a month after its birth. Pending registrations are no longer accepted at AOBA certified shows and sometimes due to errors, registrations can be delayed.

Get A Permission to Show form from owner — this form is required when you are showing an alpaca that you have contracted to buy but have not fully paid for or the transfer of ownership has not been completed.

Show Advertisement — Most shows give you an opportunity to advertise in their promotional booklets whether you attend the show or not. Another opportunity, albeit more expensive, is to sponsor a show. If advertising at a show is something you would like to do, then you need to prepare an ad or a banner that meets the show's required specifications. If you decide not to advertise in this manner, then it is always

AOBA Show Rules — It's always a good idea to read the "rules of engagement" before the show. Consider bringing the rules to the show or at least parts which are pertinent to showing alpacas.

ALPACA STUFF TO TAKE TO SHOWS

Once you have made all of the outside arrangements for the show you, should set aside those items needed for the care and feeding of the alpacas, this includes but is not limited to:

Stall Mats — Each show seems to have a different type of bedding (sod, straw, cardboard) that they use in the alpaca stalls. To keep the alpacas clean during the show, we place plastic stall mats over the supplied bedding. The mats allow the urine to drain through to the bedding underneath and it is much easier to scoop poop from the plastic mats than from sod, straw or cardboard.

Water buckets — You will need one for each alpaca stall.

Hay feeders — We prefer using the canvas hanging feeders (not rope or net) because there is less tendency for the hay to get in the smallest cria's top knot and it keeps the hay off the mats thus lessening the chance of contamination. Do not use the rope or net hay feeders as there is chance that an alpaca will get hung up in the ropes and strangle itself.

Mineral Pellets & Pans — We always bring the mineral pellets that the alpacas are accustomed to eating and bring one feed pan for each alpaca to minimize the amount of fighting for food.

Halters & Leads — We carry two different halters and leads - one for general use and one for the shows. We like to try to



to the show.

Tables — We cover our table with a floor length table cloth with our farm name on the front of the skirt. We use the top of the table to showcase pictures of our alpacas, sales lists, rack cards and the like. Underneath the table which is hidden by the table cloth we hide our hay, medicine kit, poop scoop, rake and other tack items which are unsightly.

Fiber/Yarn & Products - Everyone loves alpaca fiber. To attract the public's attention adding finished alpaca products like sweaters, socks, and afghans lets people know what alpaca fiber can be used for.

Bowl & Candy - Looking at all those alpacas is hungry work. To attract visitors to your stall, candy is a good way to break the ice and start a conversation.

Alpaca Articles & Literature - If you have published or written any articles on alpacas, shows are a great way to get them out there! Plus they are great take-a-ways for visitors.

Tool kit - We usually carry a tool kit for general use. Items like hammer, pliers, duct tape, bungee cords, cable ties and velcro. These are just in case something breaks and we can fix it until we can get it properly attended to. You'll find this equipment comes in handy when you are setting up or taking down your show displays.

In some cases, alpaca owners feel overwhelmed by all of the steps that it takes to show alpacas and as a consequence never show their alpacas. In other cases, they only have one or two alpacas to show and it is not cost effective. So if you have read this far and are convinced that showing is not for you, here is a great alternative. For the creative alpaca owner, there is always a way to show your alpaca. Many that attend the shows do not have an exact match of stalls space to alpacas. As a result, they have a slot or two that could be filled with other alpacas. Talk to your neighboring farms and see what shows they are going to. See if they are open to seeing some of your alpacas to the show along with theirs. In an upcoming show, we are going to be taking an alpaca from another farm to show because we have an open space and they can't make the show. They will register their alpaca for the show and indicate that the alpaca will be stalled in our stall space. What a great way to get your alpaca shown and get introduced to the thrills of showing your alpacas!

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