

U.S. Alpaca Fiber Council Recommendations, Code of Practice, & Basic Guidelines for Fleece Harvest, Skirting & Sorting, and Grading & Classing

This document is copied from a brochure created by the U.S. Alpaca Fiber Council. The last section in this recreation is not from the U.S.A.F.C. The section that addresses Grade at the end of the second page has been copied from the U.S. Alpaca Fiber Standard created by the Alpaca Owners Association Fiber Committee

FLEECE HARVEST

FLEECE HARVEST is the process of collecting and separating of fleece at the actual time of shearing based upon shorn regions of the body.

At the time of shearing, fleece is harvested along body divisions as referenced in the drawing on the front cover. These divisions often take into account length, fineness and uniformity of fineness without assigning grades to them. In the past, terms used in this practice were firsts, seconds and thirds. As this industry progresses, it is important to reserve those designations for actual grades and call the fleece harvest by the region of the body they come from or by Bag Collection designation A, B, C.

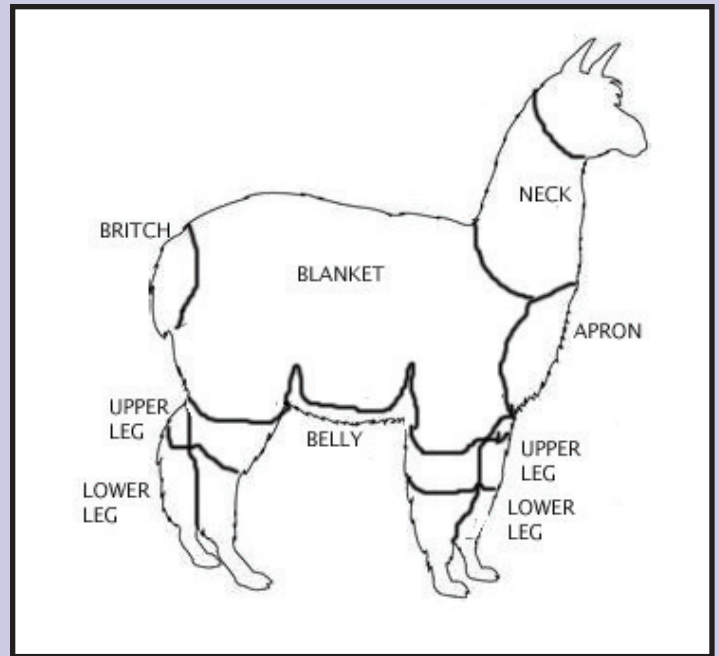
As fleece is shorn off the alpaca, fiber should be harvested by area of body into separate clear bags. This will enable further separation by sorting into type, color, grade and length at the skirting table either during shearing or at a later date and location.

Fiber should be collected into bags as follows:

- Bag A: Blanket: Prime Fleece, may include portion of consistent Upper Leg* fiber above the guard hair line.
- Bag B: Neck: Neck fiber.
- Bag C: Other: Upper Leg not consistent with Blanket, Belly, Apron and Coarser Fiber from other areas.

* In some cases you may find the upper leg to be similar in micron, length and uniformity as the blanket. In this instance it is usually shorn as part of the prime fleece and is included in the A bag.

SKIRTING is the minimum process suggested before sending fleece for processing or sending to a collection. It is best done at time of shearing or shortly thereafter and should be done even if the intent of the grower is single fleece processing.



Skirting is the process of taking the harvested fiber within a given Bag (A,B,C) and removing coarser fiber that may have been included (such as britch fiber from near the rear or tail that may have been included in bag A). It should also include removing contaminants such as debris, hay, etc, removing stains, off color spots and areas of strong hairy fiber typically found along the edges of the prime / blanket (Bag A).

It is important to check fleece for tenderness, either in the tips (typically found in juvenile fleeces where shearing has not been done within a few weeks of birth), or breaks within the staple or locks themselves. Fleece with tips that break or have tender breaks throughout will not process well and should be put aside and reserved for personal use.

Areas of longer or shorter length fibers not consistent with the rest of the fiber within a given bag are also removed at this time. Fleece can be bounced or gently shaken on the skirting table to allow dust and small particles to fall out. Second cuts should be picked out. Fleece should be evaluated at this time for color. Fleece with off color fibers present should be noted to allow combining in a gray color group.

SORTING of an alpaca fleece is the dividing of the harvested (and often skirted) fleece into batches for baling or processing with the goal of producing parcels of fleece which are uniform in characteristics and properties. It can be done on the farm by trained individuals who often are also trained as Graders/Classers. More typically, sorting is done once fleeces are shifted to a centralized collection and/or baling location.

Sorting is the process of going through the A, B and/ or C bags of fleece and further dividing those areas into more uniform batches of similar fiber according to Type, Color, Grade and Length as described in the Basic Guidelines. This sorted fiber is combined with fleece from multiple alpacas creating large, uniform batches of fiber. This process increases mill efficiency and product quality and aids in decreasing the cost of production while establishing repeatable quality.

Sorting is not an intended, nor practical, process for single fleece processing. However, it can increase the value of harvest for an individual alpaca when combined with other sorted fiber from other alpacas on individual farms by 1) batching it with other farms or 2) when it is submitted to fleece collection organizations or groups. This process changes the harvest from a by-the-animal harvest to a by-the-pound commodity.

When sorting is done at the farm level, it is important to understand that the individual sorted parts of the fleece must be combined with other fleeces to ensure a large enough processing batch. While a single fleece may be sorted into three or more individual grades, it is not practical, nor economical, to ask a mill to process such small quantities.

GRADING is not Sorting. Grading is the determination of fineness in a given fiber sample (whether whole fleece or portion thereof) as presented. The entire sample is given a Grade that represents the fineness based on strongest micron fiber present and is then placed into grade lines with samples of similar fiber diameter. Grading implements fineness standards to ensure uniform and predictable lines of U.S. alpaca fiber utilized in large batch processing, commercial sale or use.

CLASSING should not be confused with Grading or Sorting. Classing is further separation into various lines according to type, color, grade and length as dictated by end use production or buyer requirements. This process is adjusted for individual use, specific mill or buyer orders. However, it is important that lines of fiber are determined that represent sufficient quantities for baling.

BASIC GUIDELINES

Please note: These are Basic Grade designations and can be altered, combined or expanded based upon user or buyer requirements and needs. Groups

are listed only as a guideline to combining Grades if desired. Combining may be done as suggested or in part within Groups or in other designations as end use requires.

TYPE: Huacaya or Suri LENGTH

Please note: These are Basic Length designations and can be altered, combined or expanded based upon user or buyer requirements and needs. It is important to ensure shortest length meets the minimum of 1.5" in unstretched fiber.

SHORT: Length 1.5 to 3 inches- Woolen processing
LONG: Length 3.0 to 5 inches- Worsted processing

COLOR

Please note: These are Basic Color designations and can be altered, combined or expanded based upon user or buyer requirements and needs. It is important to be aware of solid color as opposed to fiber with off color fibers present within the blanket. Fiber exhibiting off color presence should be assigned to the grey color categories based on shade of off color fibers.

COLOR GROUPS with the colors they include

WH White

BG Beige

F Light Fawn, Medium Fawn, Dark Fawn

BR Light Brown, Medium Brown, Dark Brown, Bay

Black BL True Black

GR Grey (further division by Silver Grey and/or Rose Grey)

GRADE

Alpaca fiber shall be recognized within the seven (7) grades defined by micron span as follows:

- **Grade 0 15.0 – 16.9 micron**
- **Grade 1 17.0 – 19.9 micron**
- **Grade 2 20.0 – 22.9 micron**
- **Grade 3 23.0 – 25.9 micron**
- **Grade 4 26.0 – 28.9 micron**
- **Grade 5 29.0 – 31.9 micron**
- **Grade 6 32.0 – 34.9 micron**

LENGTH

Length shall be within the following processable* ranges:

- Huacaya between 2 and 5.5 inches
- Suri between 2 and 7.5 inches

* Processing length should be uniform across the blanket.