

In the spring of this year, Suri Network members will be introduced to a document titled The Suri Fiber Harvesting Code of Practice. A Code of Practice is a tool that can be used to assist people before and during shearing day, and over time, should bring a level of consistency to the preparation of our national clip. Australia implemented its Code several years ago for its alpaca members, Canada's co-operative introduced its Code in 2001, and both the sheep industry, worldwide, and the mohair industry, worldwide, have Codes of Practice. However, there has never been a Code specifically designed for Suri – we will be the first in the world. And the SNPDC believes this will be the cornerstone for future efforts to establish ourselves as the best Suri fiber producers in the world. Below are answers to questions that we suspect many members will have:

What is a Code of Practice?

Well, this type of document accomplishes several things:

- 1) It lays out a system of organization leading up to shearing day that allows the process of shearing to run most efficiently – we are willing to bet that most of you are following these procedures already;
- 2) It brings a balance to the relationship between the Producer and the Shearer by laying out the duties and responsibilities of each party;
- 3) It creates a level of consistency in fiber harvesting from one farm to the next that will encourage the development of fiber buyers, fiber pools, and other types of fiber commerce.

Do SN members have to use the Code?

Certainly not. It is simply a tool to assist you in harvesting the best possible clip. That being said, as the SNPDC continues to develop more avenues for our members clip, including the possible concept of pooling Suri for further processing and resale, we will encourage participating farms to follow the Code. Why? Because buyers need consistency – whether it is a buyer of raw fiber or a buyer of a garment, people want to know what they are getting, and they don't want to have to do research and gather data before each purchase.

What are the benefits of using the Code?

Because we are introducing this tool at the very inception of our efforts to build a fiber market, and because there is such a limited buyers market for Suri in the United States today, we cannot quantify the cost savings for you at this time. However, we can tell you a few things with certainty.

- 1) All commercial protein fiber industries and associations have a Code of Practice today except for the U.S. alpaca industry. The US sheep industry was the one of last of these to adopt a Code, and it was demanded of them by global producers. Those producers rely on a standardized system of fiber collection to keep their costs down. For U.S. Suri to be taken seriously by commercial producers, we will need to have a Code in place and available for producers to use.
- 2) The U.S. alpaca industry, in general, has a poor reputation among fiber artists for inconsistent product from one farm to the next. The Suri Network wants to ensure that our customers do not have this same experience – many fiber artists are just discovering Suri, and this is our opportunity to show them our very best clip!
- 3) The Code sets high standards for our luxury fiber.
- 4) Without a standardized system of harvesting fiber, we will have no commercial buyers.

What is expected of SN members in 2010?

For 2010, the SNPDC simply asks that you review the Code and familiarize yourself with its contents. You may choose to implement some or all of the organizational pieces this year, you may choose to review it some more and try it out in 2011, or you may decide you never want to use it - that's OK.

For those who are interested in implementing the full document, there are a few pieces for which further training is advisable. Specifically, the sorting component of the document should not be performed by you unless you have taken a sorting class put on by the SN. The SNPDC will be working on putting together seminars for our members related to the sorting standards and hope to launch these in later 2010 or early 2011.

The shearing section is another piece that will need some training on the part of your shearer. We hope to begin offering that training in 2011 or beyond.

What if I have already taken a Sorting Class?

Don't worry, our goal is not to re-invent the wheel. We are still working through details of this – we may suggest a “refresher” seminar for instance – but the idea will be to encourage those who have already taken the initiative to learn about sorting, not discourage.

I'm a member of a cooperative already, will this conflict with any of their rules?

We don't believe so. Much of the information presented in here is standard practice around the world, and existing cooperatives have used the same material as we have to create their Codes.

If other industries already have a Code, why can't we just use theirs?

Much of the information in here will be similar to other Codes. However, alpacas in general, and Suris specifically, have their own special needs. Just to list a couple of examples, we all know that Suri fiber drapes instead of growing away from the skin – so there will be special shearing and fiber gathering techniques that will be standardized in this Code over time. Alpacas in general are best shorn stretched out, whereas the sheep Code does not need to address this. So, each Code will have its nuances, and Suri fiber will be no different than other types of fiber in needing its own criteria.

How long do you expect it to take for the practices in this document to be fully implemented?

We anticipate a three to four year time frame to have all the training available to people, if and when they decide they want to follow the Code. In the meantime, though, there will be components of the document that we will ask people to follow if they want to try it out. We will have specific information about this when the document is rolled out.

Where will I find the Suri Fiber Harvesting Code of Practice in 2010?

We will have it posted on the SN website for people to review. Additionally, it will be mailed out to the membership.

Will I need to follow every aspect of the Code to be a participant?

There will be some components that can be adjusted to meet the individual needs of each member farm, and we note this in the document. The document gives everyone an ideal to follow and we ask each Code participant to work as closely to that ideal as possible. But you to use your better judgement when it comes to things such as how many workers you require to operate most efficiently, whether you sort on the day of shearing or later, whether you hire a sorter or decide to do it yourself after taking a course, etc.

Wow, this is awesome and I can't wait to read through it – when will it be out?

We hope to have the Code posted soon in order to give everyone a chance to implement at least some components this year.

Conclusion

The Suri Network has a reputation for innovation and progress. This document is just another example of how the SN is moving our industry forward and seizing upon the opportunity to be a world leader in Suri production. We encourage everyone to review this document on line, and certainly contact your local SNPDC representative if you have questions.