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Product Development Committee Newsletter ~ April, 2011

Welcome to the first Suri Network Product Development Committee (SNPDC) Newsletter. The SNPDC wants to keep you informed of our activities, provide information about Suri fiber, fiber processing and products and pass on other articles and information of interest. We will be doing newsletters every 2-3 months, and provide an archive of past issues on the Suri Network website.

The SNPDC has been very active over the past three years, and I can tell you that the committee members, current and past, are committed to moving the Suri fiber industry forward and providing meaningful education and information for our membership. The focus is on fiber and product processing and relative promotion that will help our members develop their markets and gain the highest value for their fiber and products.

The fiber process begins with the Suri alpaca stock through to final Suri product design and marketing. So, in order to understand our Suri fiber products, some of the efforts reach back to the implication of breeding decisions, a methodology for shearing that yields the best possible clip, identifying issues and solutions for Suri fiber processing and doing research on the characteristics and best uses of Suri fiber.

So, let us give you a brief update of some of the SNPDC activities:

- Completed the first Code of Harvest for shearing Suri alpacas. It is available on the Suri Network website along with a one-page reference summary.
- Provided a series of seminars across the nation that focused on Suri fiber preparation. A new series is being developed for this year. Dates and locations will be published on the Suri Network website as they are formalized.
- Development of a periodic newsletter to keep the membership informed on SNPDC activities and provide a forum for information—this is the 1st edition!
- Surveys of our membership and mills—We have just sent out our member survey and hope to determine what you have in the way of fiber, how/if you are processing, selling, etc. and any problems that you are struggling with. This information will help us determine how we can better support your needs. If you haven't filled out the survey yet...please do! We will be using the information!
- Survey to many of the mills that are processing Suri about the issues they experience with Suri processing and any research or changes in their processes that they may be evaluating or implementing. The more we understand about the fiber characteristics and challenges, the better opportunity to find viable solutions for improved processing results.

Suri Alpaca - Rarest of Breeds, Ultimate Natural Fiber

What we are working on:

- Top Project—last year during a trip to Peru, some of our members bought some very nice Suri top back for processing. The SNPDC has had extensive discussions about how we can best use this prime fiber for furthering our knowledge of Suri fiber characteristics and possible best uses. We are currently in communication with Gaston College on developing a research project that will allow us to use our top to explore various woven fabric options to see what combination will make the finest fabric. We are excited about the project and hope to have some results to present at this year's Suri Symposium.
- Develop a library of known articles, relative publications and papers concerning Suri fiber and products. We will also try to include information on competitive fiber products where we can leverage the information for our expanded understanding of the industry
- Continued support of demonstration booths at major festivals across the nation to help increase visibility to Suri fiber. These have been extremely successful over the past two years. In 2010, we had opportunities to be vendors and actually sell product from the booths at two events. The availability of product at the time they discover Suri was extremely successful but requires a great deal of additional coordination for the events. The SNPDC is evaluating our plans and ability to manage future vendor opportunities.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the member volunteers that have helped us by contributing to the education efforts, participating in staffing booths, providing fiber, writing articles, sharing information and hosting and presenting at seminars over the past few years. We literally could not be successful without the member support!

As you can tell, the SNPDC is very active and passionate about supporting the Suri industry. We hope you enjoy the Newsletter and we welcome feedback on content and ideas for changes that will make the Newsletter more valuable to all!

Kathy Gilliland, SNPDC Chair

The SNPDC Debut at the Black Sheep Gathering June 2010

by SNPDC Member Christine Gardiner, Suri Futures, Cave Junction Oregon

Black Sheep Gathering (BSG) is one of the largest fiber festivals on the West Coast, and in the U.S. Starting over 30 years ago in Eugene Oregon, BSG has become a Mecca for fiber artists and fiber producers. This show now draws visitors from as far away as Vancouver BC, San Diego and New York. The event offers halter shows for many sheep and goat breeds, fleece shows, fiber arts competitions, classes in many kinds of fiber arts and demonstrations of many techniques; BSG is a veritable beehive of fiber arts activity for three days!

To participate in BSG, the SNPDC teamed with Amelia Garripoli of The Bellwether <http://www.thebellwether.biz/>. Amelia teaches spinning, sells "Spinolution" spinning wheels and has been a vendor at BSG for years. Through SN member Lynn Deichman, Amelia kindly invited the SNPDC to provide a Suri educational display alongside her Bellwether sales and teaching booth. It was a great match; she set up a series of spinning wheels for public use. On the theme of "Drop in and Spin Suri," we provided the roving for handspinners to drop in to experience spinning fine Suri roving. Roving is clean fleece that has been "carded" to align the fibers into a long strand or 'loose rope'. Roving is the normal preparation for raw fiber to be spun either by hand or by machine.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Suri Network Product Development Committee will be accepting applications from members who may be interested in volunteering on the Product Development Committee. Calling on those members who may have a keen interest in Suri fiber and product development; that have time to participate in committee projects and monthly meetings; and that have a passion for moving the Suri fiber industry forward...if this is you, then you would be a valuable asset to this group. Your enthusiasm, time, personal integrity and keen textile interest or expertise along with a commitment to Suri Network goals and objectives would be great assets. Please feel free to contact Product Development Chair Kathy Gilliland at 247 Sloan Road, Livermore, CO 80536, 970-493-7783 or email dkgilliland@hughes.net

Suri Network member Christine Gardiner of Suri Futures Oregon, Celeste Kreienseick of Thunder Mountain Suri Alpacas Washington, and Sara Marquez of Marquez Farms Alpacas California hosted the weekend. We had well over a hundred visitors, from experienced spinners to kids just learning to spin; most spun their first Suri fiber at our booth. SNPDC had made sure to provide high quality roving, mostly grades 2-3 fiber in white and fawn, so that the tactile experience of the public was sure to delight.

Volunteer Master Spinners were organized in advance to spin at the demonstration wheels, "priming the pump" for others to give it a try. For the 1st time at a fiber festival, we offered for sale the Suri Knit Patterns, rovings, yarns and raw fleeces from the local farms. We helped lots of folks; spinners, knitters and other fiber artists, to learn about the unique qualities of Suri fiber, setting the stage for new markets and many uses of wonderful Suri fiber on the West Coast.

About Fleece Characteristics

by SNPDC member, Donna M. Rudd, Suri Textiles, Ponoka, Canada

In the world of natural animal fibre production there are various means of fleece identification and preparation that takes place before the final textiles are made into garments. Each of these steps contributes to the quality of the final product. Fibre diameter is the most important quality characteristic since it governs the quality of the yarn which can be spun from a given weight. Fibre diameter is also a significant factor in the aesthetic property of softness and hand. Quality can mean visual superiority which includes character and style; uniformity of staple length; evenness along the staple length; a soft handle and high lustre. Suri is one of world's most lustrous, long, and smooth natural fibres produced today and Suri meets all those considerations mentioned above for 'superior quality'.

In order to provide textile processors with uniformly graded fibres, the shorn fleece must be **skirted** to remove the coarsest, dirtiest and least valuable sections

from the fleece. Skirting is generally part of the shearing process because the object of this exercise is to remove those elements that could cause contamination to the more valuable portions of the fleece. The sooner the dirty belly locks, second cuts, manure and tags from the britch area and any excessive amounts of vegetable matter are removed the better.

The next step is the practice of separating or **sorting** the fleece, appraising it for variations of micron, color, length and excessive guard hair content. Depending on the farm operations sorting can be done at the time of shearing or at a later date. Sorting portions of a fleece according to location is one of the quickest ways to start, by separating the lower leg, apron or bib area, britch, neck and areas of excessive vegetable matter or those areas that are different in any way for the main blanket of the fleece. A sorter should always check for tensile strength so that a tender fleece does not become mixed in with other fleeces, and tender

portions of an otherwise sound fleece such as the spinal areas are removed. A uniform sort of similar microns, length and color without contaminates of excessive vegetable matter, second cuts, tenderness or coarse fibres results in a uniform blanket that is more valuable to the producer, the processor and ultimately the buyers.

Once a shorn fleece has been skirted and sorted down to the blanket or best fibre areas from the animal the next step will be to appraise and **grade** all portions of the Suri fleece. Sometimes this process is done handful by handful. Grades are set by the industry to standards that maximize the quality of

the lot by using the micron or average fibre diameter system similar to wool and mohair producers. The range within each grade is approximately 3 microns for each grade that is then matched with similar lengths and colors. One blanket may contain many different grades, numerous colors, various lengths and a vast array of contaminates. Graders are knowledgeable in the standards for each grade and work diligently in building lots of 'like with like', ensuring impurities have been removed and documentation is correct. Graders are a vital step in ensuring quality control for all the sorts.

An example of 3-micron grading system;

Grade #1	< under 20 microns	Suri Ultra Fine	(SUF)
Grade #2	20.1 –22.9 microns	Suri Superfine	(SSF)
Grade #3	23.0 –25.9 microns	Suri Fine	(SF)
Grade #4	26.0 –28.9 microns	Suri Medium	(SM)
Grade #5	29.0 –31.9 microns	Suri Coarse	(SC)
Grade #6	32.0 –35.0 microns	Suri Extra Coarse	(SEC)

Until recently North America Suri fibre has been processed in relatively small lots, often just individual fleeces that have not been sorted and graded, but with the increased demand for larger quantities of graded Suri fibre, fibre pools and co-ops there has been a change from the smaller craft style of processing to large commercial lots. To meet the challenges of commercial market demands for quality it is important for large pools of Suri fibre to be sorted and graded to assure the commercial buyers have options not only of quantity but also of quality.

There is one more step in the chain of fibre preparation as it continues up the chain from raw fibre to textile production and that is the act of 'Classing'. A classer has a clear understanding of how yarns and fabrics are made; the characteristics of fibre blends and those traits which contribute to desired end products and function. Once a classer is sure the grade is correctly assigned and properly

labelled and that the sort meets predetermined requirements, they then consider processing options such as blending with other fibres; choosing between woollen or worsted spinning and deciding what the end products will best match the grade criteria. For example, grade 1 Suri (under 20 microns) is NOT best suited for hard wearing products such as rugs or socks. But grade 1 either 100% Suri or blended with a small amount of similar fibre such as silk, tencel or fine wool is suited for garments worn against the skin or shawls where drape and softness are important.

As Suri fibre becomes more available, more accessible, more recognised and more 'branded' it is important that producers take every possible step to ensure quality to the public. Sorting, grading and classing accurately means that the buyer can be confident that what he/she is purchasing is of the quality stated.

Quick Reference Guide to the Code of Harvest

by SNPDC member, Sue Simonton, Little Gidding Farms

This guide was developed as a quick reference to the Code of Harvest that can be posted in your barn as a quick reminder of the important Code practices. Copies of this guide and the full Code of Harvest are available on the Suri Network website at www.SuriNetwork.org.

SEMINAR HOSTS WANTED

Suri Network has produced an educational seminar specifically for Suri breeders to apply to their fiber production program. This valuable tool is a one day seminar where breeders have the opportunity for extensive "hands on and in Suri fleece" while learning about Suri fleece characteristics and how they relate to end product. Time is spent evaluating fleece parts, sorts and grades, identifying negative fleece traits and how they affect processing and final products. The comprehensive training manual covers subjects on how breeding decisions, pasture management, fiber harvesting, shearing and sorting, affect the quality of your clip production and ultimately your yarns and end products. Please contact Suri Network Office at office@surinetwork.org, 970-586-5876 or SN Product Development committee seminar representative Donna M. Rudd at donna.rudd070@gmail.com or by phoning 403-783-3292 to book a seminar and review host responsibilities.

MILLS & YOU

Systems in use today for the manufacture of long staple fibers such as alpaca into spun yarns are either the woollen, worsted and semi-worsted systems.

Woollen mills generally do not process fibers over 3-4 inches long and they make yarns that are bulky, lofty, and fluffy. The woollen process has the least amount of steps involved to make yarn so ultimately is the least expensive process.

Suri by its very nature is not bulky, lofty or fluffy, but long, sleek and smooth. It is ideal for processing by using the semi woollen or worsted method making smooth, compact and lustrous yarns.



WOOLEN YARNS

- fiber length 1.5--3 in.
- opening and carding unaligned fibers of mixed lengths
- rovings, batts, woollen spun yarns
- low twist yarns are bulky, whiskery, lofty, soft
- yarns used in apparel, carpets, knitting

WORSTED YARN

- length 1.5- 8 inches
- opening, carding, gilling, & "combing"
- short fibers removed by combing process
- produces "combed top"
- fibers uniform in length and very well aligned fine, smooth, compact and uniform yarns

SEMI WORSTED YARN

- fiber length 3.5- 5.5 in.
- opening, carding, dehairing (optional), gill box, pindrafter, spinning
- rovings, batts, semi-worsted yarns
- spun yarns with fibers aligned more than woollen; less bulky
- knitting and weaving