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Product Development Committee Newsletter ~ December, 2011

Welcome to the fall edition of the Suri Network Product Development Committee newsletter (SNPDC) compiled by Donna Rudd. The SNPDC works hard to keep our membership informed about fiber processing options, product development, educational programs and tools along with articles and other information regarding Suri alpaca fiber.

Suri Network Product Development Committee is happy to announce new members **Collins Griffith** of Sandollar Alpacas, Kennewick, Washington and **Beth Brown**, Odelia Farms, Troy, Illinois to the committee along with Kathleen Cullen as Board Liaison. We look forward to working with these new members with fresh ideas, expertise and enthusiasm for Suri. As we welcome them, we are sad to say that Lynn Deichman, of GlimmerGlass Alpacas has resigned after providing our committee with her time and expertise for the past 3

years. Lynn worked tirelessly on our committee with the Fiber Festivals. She attended the SN booth at the NYS Sheep and Wool Festival in Rhinebeck, NY and SOAR working on bookings, schedules and coordinations of all the festivals that SN attended. We owe a great deal of gratitude to Lynn for all that she has done for this committee and the Suri fiber community especially in the fiber festivals across this nation. Thank you Lynn – we will miss you.

MESSAGE FROM SNPDC CHAIR; KATHY GILLILAND

The urgency of understanding Suri fiber production, processing and product development have risen to a new level of importance given the challenging economic times we live in today. One of our most important goals is the continued perseverance to understand the unique characteristics of Suri and how we can process the fiber to yield the best end products. The long staple length and slickness of the Suri fiber shaft make it a challenge for many non-commercial mills to process, but these same characteristics are also what give us such elegant and unique end products!

The SNPDC continues to pursue ways in which to learn and inform members about how to better produce and process Suri fiber and then to determine best uses, creative innovations and revenue generating ideas. Following are some of this year's SNPDC efforts.

- ◆ Continued fiber seminars across North America. We are also working closely with several mills to see if we can book more seminars at the mill locations so that people can get the benefit of learning about the fiber and can also see how the fiber processing works as well. We need our farms to be well informed about Suri fiber processing in order to gain the best return on products and to help sell alpacas!

Suri Alpaca - Rarest of Breeds, Ultimate Natural Fiber

- ◆ Expanding our pattern offerings. We are working on the development of new pattern options with an expanded variety of garments and level of knitting expertise and will be adding some crocheting patterns as well.
- ◆ Continue providing demo booths at key fiber festivals throughout North America. We are upgrading our staffing and demo displays this year and are looking for ways to meet the challenge of having product available for purchase (we are limited to demo booths at most of the festivals we attend). We will be working with local organizations and farms in areas where we will have the demo booths to encourage them to come together and host a vendor booth if they can get accepted to sell Suri product. There is always a strong demand for raw fiber, roving, yarn and end products once people have a chance to see and feel Suri fiber. We don't want to miss the opportunity to get some Suri into their hands!
- ◆ Continued research of Suri fiber and products. We are still pursuing the "Top Project" to get a variety of woven fabric samples produced from Suri top to better understand the characteristics of Suri in each design and technique. We have also added a research project to test a North American combing process (yes, we finally have a mill in the US with combing capabilities!) using grade 2 North American Suri fiber and we will be

developing some special products with the fiber. We will document the processes and results for both projects and post on the website as they are completed.

- ◆ Compile successes and ideas around products and the generation of revenue from Suri fiber. There are some very creative people in the Suri industry that are finding new and innovative ways to produce and market their Suri fiber and products. We will be looking for those innovative ideas and products and share them on the website in the near future.

The SNPDC is always in need of new volunteers to help us move the Suri product industry forward. We have many more things we would like to pursue than we have resources to commit. We need your energy and thoughts on how we can bring more value to you, our members. Please consider contributing some of your time to our committee and supporting the various projects, festivals and seminars. We currently have two openings on the SNPDC and would love to have a full committee that can share the load. It is a very rewarding endeavour. I can personally attest to the excellent learning experience from being on the committee and the value of the expertise available within the existing committee members. Please let me know if you are interested in applying or if you are willing to volunteer for a particular activity.

Kathy Gilliland, SNPDC Chair

POWER POINT PRESENTATION FROM SN SYMPOSIUM

Follow the link to the Power Point presentation that was presented at the Symposium in Chicago by Kathy Gilliland, Chair of the SNPDC. Please check out the complete presentation on the SN web site for a summary of the SNPDC accomplishments this year and highlights of both the members and mill surveys. www.surinetwork.org

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

The Product Development Committee would like to ask for volunteers to step forward and volunteer for this committee either as a full time position or even just to add you area of expertise for a one time project. Possibly you have expertise in computer skills, photography, writing & editing, art, and knitting or crocheting, pattern making etc. This committee would like to accept your one time contribution to a project no matter how small it may be, we have projects that may involve just a small portion of your time and so please consider completing a Committee Member Application which can be found at www.SuriNetwork.org (then click on SNPDC). Our membership assistance is of utmost importance to the success of our projects, so please consider helping in any way you can.

REMEMBER; "CODE OF HARVEST" LOCATED ON SURI NETWORK WEB PAGE

This very important fiber harvesting document was developed by the Product Development committee to assist breeders in understanding the basics of fiber preparation, how husbandry skills play a role in determining the quality of the fiber produced, how shearing techniques can have a major impact on fiber quality and how breeding decisions impact fiber processing.

The guide is intended to give breeders a broad overview of the process of turning raw fiber into high quality products, so that breeders can play a more meaningful role in the direction of our industry.

SILENT AUCTION

If you read the newsletter from the SN board of directors you would have seen that there was a Silent Auction held in conjunction with the Symposium this year. The Product Development coordinate this event and it was hugely successful bringing in \$1250.00 for Suri fiber research purposes. We would like to thank all those who contributed items for the Silent Auction (new and used) and to those who purchased those items and especially Holli Cox, Hidden Hilltop Alpaca Ranch for all her work coordinating this event on behalf of SNPDC. We are so pleased at the involvement of our members who stepped forward to contribute in whatever way they could to 'Suri research'. A big thank you from our committee to each of you.

BOOKMARK PROJECT

The Product Development Committee came up with the idea of promoting a mill that processes Suri fiber and this year New Era Fiber Mill stepped up to the plate and sponsored the Suri Bookmark which was handed out to those attending the Symposium in Chicago. This laminated bookmark featured SAM on one side and New Era Fiber mill logo and information on the other. Also, some of New Era Award winning Suri yarn was attached to the bookmark. Wow, what a stunning bookmark.

Thank you so much New Era! We appreciate your support and it makes it just that much more important that we all attend the symposium next year to see who sponsors the bookmarks and see what stunning yarns are attached!



Suri Network Booth at SOAR Fiber Festival, October 2011

SURI NETWORK BOOTH AT SOAR FIBER FESTIVAL

The booth was set up and attended by Lynn Deichman, October 2011. Lynn reports that she feels it is absolutely vital that Suri Network continue to make its presence known at Fiber Festivals across USA and it is essential to have someone knowledgeable about Suri fiber in attendance at all times. She stresses how important it is that there is a venue nearby that sells Suri products such as yarns, roving and raw fleece to the public and this is where our breeders really need to step up to the plate and share the spotlight in promoting Suri fiber. Raw fleeces, carded rovings, dyed locks, rovings and yarns are in huge demand at the festivals and she stressed the importance of having ready supplies when the demand is so high.



Items donated for Silent Auction Fund Raiser at Summer Symposium



Suri scarf dyed and knitted by Sue Simonton of Little Gidding Suri Farms

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT MILL SURVEY

This committee worked hard to develop a questionnaire to send out to approximately 70 mills across North America in the spring of this year. The survey results will be posted on the Suri Network web site for our membership to review. While only a small portion of mills responded to our questionnaire, we continue to strive for updates and information from those mills that wish to have their information posted.

It is not the intention of our committee to evaluate, promote or influence the use of any one processor over another. The results of this survey are simply a tool to provide our membership with information that has been gathered.

"MILLS & YOU" *prepared by Donna M. Rudd*

Tips to know when you are talking to a processor about having your fiber processed.

- 1. Know your fleece/clip quality and quantity**, so that you can determine the best end products before processing. For example; higher micron (coarser) shorter fleeces (usually from older animals) do not make soft fine knitting yarns, but this fiber does make excellent durable core spun yarns for rugs and mats. On the other hand, if you have numerous cria fleeces that are very fine, this may make excellent fine knitting yarns but many mills have a difficult time processing the fiber without breaking it which causes shedding in the yarns and end product.
- 2. Have a concept in your mind of what you want made before you contact mills.** For example: are you having your fleeces processed for your own end-use or do you have a marketing plan in place. If you know the quality, quantity and end product then you can discuss wisely with numerous processors the best options available to you.
- 3. Know the lengths and grades of your fleeces and sorts.** This information is so important before you shop for a mill to process your fiber because not all mills can process Suri, not all mills can process Suri over 5 inches long and most mills just cannot process Suri without blending it with another fiber so that it will go through their equipment.
- 4. Send clean, well-prepared Suri fiber!** It is not to the mills advantage to do a 'onetime poor job' and it is not to your advantage to receive poor results from a mill. Mills strive very hard to produce the best possible results with what they receive, however they cannot make outstanding products from less than good quality raw goods. The old saying is so true, 'You get back what you put in'. A producer that takes time to skirt and sort their fiber will be rewarded with superior end products.
- 5. Have an understanding of your primary market:** Consider who will be purchasing your end product if you are not using your own entire clip. It is vital in determining how to have your fiber processed, so take the time to review your potential market place and marketing strategy to determine how to best market your fiber.
- 6. Discussion between the producer (you) and the processor (the mill) is of the utmost importance.** Mills are excellent resourceful tools that can assist you in determining the best use for your fiber, take time to discuss options available to you. It may save you time and investment costs in the long run.

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF TEXTILE MACHINERY CONFERENCE

Recently the past president of the Product Development Committee, Liz Vahlkamp, travelled to Barcelona, Spain to attend the International Exhibition of Textile Machinery Conference and helped host the Alpaca United booth. It was fortunate Liz could attend and bring her knowledge of Suri fiber to the representatives from around the world. Liz has kindly provided us with a report on her findings and we would like to pass that information on to you for your information. **Thank you Liz for supporting Suri breeders across America, we appreciate your support.**

After returning from ITMA as a representative of Alpaca United, I thought it would be worthwhile to put in writing some of the “take-aways” that I had from working the AU booth. Overall, it was a great experience, and a very worthwhile four days. I did attend as a representative of all alpaca, but as a Suri owner, I was also looking for opportunities and information around our specific fiber.

Some background:

This was the first time that ITMA invited fiber groups to have booths. As a result, there were very few such booths, which gave us an opportunity to really get the word out about alpaca. The only other fiber booths that were present were one from the cotton industry (behind us), and one from Woolmark (next to us).

The machinery displays were quite elaborate, so having an eye catching booth was really critical. Nick Hahn knew this, and as such, our booth caught a lot of attention and got a lot

of compliments. Contrast this with the Woolmark booth which was rather uninspiring.

We had a good number of people that came into the booth and felt the tiles that were displayed. Tactile information was a key, and where appropriate, I directed people to the Suri tiles.

The trade show encompassed eight convention center halls, all connected by a second floor walkway.

Our booth was located in Hall 5 with the knitwear machinery. We were located towards the front of the hall. As such, we were well positioned to receive traffic and speak to people interested in yarns.

The purpose of the booth was simply to let people know that the United States has alpaca fiber, and that we are reaching a volume level that should allow us to enter the commercial market.

We distributed 2,100 AU pamphlets (which had individual Suri farms and the SN represented with ads), 483 companies gave us their business cards after learning what we were doing, and 97 companies directly expressed interest in purchasing fiber or yarn.

I personally spoke with people from 30-40 different countries. This was not a “China-centric” crowd. People from all over the world and every continent were present and representing textile companies.

Important take aways - general:

One of the big “eye-openers” for me was how few yarn companies had ever even heard of “alpaca”. They had no clue. They wanted to know what the animal looked like, had all sorts of questions about the micron range, the applications, how it was different from wool, etc. And there were no “stereotypes” to this fact. Companies making high end natural yarns in Europe were just as much in the

dark about alpaca as were companies making low-end synthetic yarns.

Take away # 1 – there is more than enough business out there for both Peru and North America (and Australia, for that matter).

Take-away #2 – This prospective business extends to other Latin American countries – we had several manufacturers from Brazil and Argentina who had a vague idea of what alpaca was, but were not buyers and seemed to have no loyalty to other Latin American countries (i.e.: Peru or Bolivia). They were just as open to buying from the U.S.

The interest in natural fibers was strong. In addition to the high-end manufacturers that are more familiar with natural fibers, many companies that make lower end synthetic yarns were eager to put even 20% alpaca into their product to claim a “natural” product – and because of the low amount, they seemed willing to pay a decent amount per pound.

Take away #3 – promoting alpaca (Suri) as a natural fiber is a worthy selling point in the commercial market.

There was a decent amount of interest in the natural colors. We had one company from South Africa that had done away with all of their dyeing equipment and were specifically looking for natural colors. Another that made high-end blankets and wanted only natural colors, etc.

Take away #4 – promoting the natural colors to the commercial market does have some merit.

There were a large number of knitwear and weaving companies that expressed interest in alpaca.

Take away #5 – The international market does not have to be solely for selling raw fiber. Those alpaca breeders who are looking for value-added profit for their fiber and/or would like to see the United States become a relevant textile producer again should not

SPRING EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS

Spring seminars are being planned now, so please call Suri Network office to book a date for Suri Networks 'Evaluating Suri Fiber, Locks & Fleece' seminar at your farm. Suri Network arranges for an experienced and approved industry expert to attend and instruct this seminar as well as supplying all class materials, samples and handouts, and lunch. You as host just provide the facility and ask at least 10-15 alpaca friends to participate to make this a successful event. Further information can be obtained by contacting SN office. If you wish to participate in this seminar but cannot act as host, please call SN office to find out where the nearest event is being held.

be reliant on the U.S. market alone to get these results. There are plenty of opportunities to sell yarn into the international commercial market. AND there are plenty of opportunities to sell high-quality yarn to high-end knitwear and fabric companies to secure a reasonable margin on their goods.

Those companies who do purchase alpaca currently were excited to learn of another possible source of alpaca beyond Peru. We heard numerous complaints about Peru's lack of service, poor quality, etc. This is not to say that Peru could not "get its act together" quickly if we really became a competitor, but ...

Take away #6 - there does appear to be a window of opportunity to work with existing alpaca buyers.

Important take-aways – Suri specific:

We had a decent number of companies using mohair for knitwear and fabric, and they were interested in expanding into other fibers. They were extremely interested in Suri.

We had several companies that already work with alpaca, and they knew the difference between Suri and Huacaya. They used both, and were receptive to working with either fiber.

Again, the tactile experience of our booth visitors was important, and feeling the Suri really won them over.

Just as there was a large interest in alpaca overall, the reception towards Suri was positive, and I continue to believe that the opportunities to develop this fiber beyond brushed fabric is huge.

Challenges – there are obviously a number of challenges, but not all are ones that a breed association can be expected to address. Nonetheless, two important challenges that SN can help with are as follows:

Simply getting enough volume to meet the potential demand. There remains a large amount of Suri fiber that is not being processed. The SN Board and SNPDC should continue to encourage SN members to "let go" of their fiber as a great first step.

Quality of fiber – There were enough companies that approached us who make high-end garments and fabric that it is clear we have an opportunity to sell into the international market and make a reasonable profit. The key will be to provide quality product and set ourselves apart from the competition. The SN Board and SNPDC should continue to support education to its members so we can all strive for a national clip that is "best in class".

Hopefully this summary gives everyone a view of the international market, how North American Suri might play a role, and how SN members might be able to benefit. And on behalf of AU, I would like to thank SN for allowing us to raise money for tile sponsorship at the 2011 Suri Network Summer Symposium. The wall of tiles was truly beautiful, and having Suri well represented was a worthwhile endeavour.



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