

**Q How did you find yourself farming alpacas?**

**A** A family decision was taken to retire from horses and we were looking for something for our grazing and saw and fell in love with alpacas.

**Q What particularly appealed to you about alpacas?**

**A** They enchanted us with their lovely expressions, their very individual personalities, their wonderful super-soft fleece and their gentleness. We find that as a family we can all enjoy different aspects of alpacas, but we all enjoy the challenge of remembering 70 faces, their personalities, their sisters, brothers and parents. This enables us to constantly assess how each alpaca is performing in health, fleece and standard of offspring.

**Q Can you make a living out of farming alpacas?**

**A** There are alpaca farms in the UK that make a living out of alpaca breeding/fleece and although we don't rely totally on income from alpacas, we often find we are being asked to sell alpacas we would rather keep! We also have a great following and interest in all our hand-knitted and hand-woven items - from our online shop and at farmers' markets and artisan fairs. If raw fleece is taken right through to the finished article, there is a worthwhile profit to be had annually, per animal.

**Q Who are your customers?**

**A** It gives us great encouragement that our main outlet for sales of alpacas is to other breeders. In the years we have been selling female alpacas, we have yet to sell to new owners. This tells us that our bloodlines, breeding decisions and



## Breeder spotlight

Jenny MacHarg, of Fowberry Alpacas, tells us about life as an alpaca farmer

commitment to alpaca welfare is appreciated and sought after by other alpaca breeders.

**Q Tell us something we wouldn't know about alpacas.**

**A** The gestation period of a female is eleven and a half months and the cria (baby) is born during the day, usually before lunch so that the cria can be up and dry before the freezing Andean nights. In Australia, 'guard' alpacas have been documented as giving their lives to protect their allocated flock of lambing ewes from predators and we have actually seen our boss mother



chasing a fox - most impressive!

British farmers are also beginning to explore the advantages of flock protectors for their lambing fields, following news of shepherds reporting their best lambing percentages ever, after introducing suitable gelded male alpacas.

**Q How do alpacas fit into your environmental awareness aims?**

**A** We are passionate about good environmental practices and the farm is run as organically as is possible bearing in mind that alpacas have lived for thousands of years in virtual isolation in the Andes where no other livestock can thrive. Our yarn also is processed without the use of harsh chemicals, dyes or detergents, thereby protecting the natural lustre and softness of the fleece.

**Q What advice would you give to someone thinking about owning alpacas?**

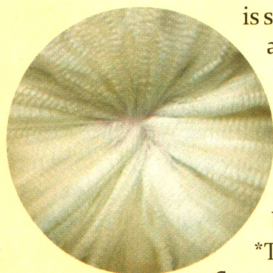
**A** Research all you can about alpacas and visit local alpaca farms, join the British Alpaca Society and perhaps if you want to progress slowly, start off with a few geldings and see how you get on. We would always wager money on having new gelding owners back within the year to buy breeding females - that's what alpacas do - enchant!

**Further information**

[www.fowberry-alpacas.com](http://www.fowberry-alpacas.com)

**Q What is the fleece worth?**

**A** At the moment in the UK, alpaca farmers are trying to build alpaca numbers, from at present approximately 30,000, to commercial proportions as quickly as possible to attract the interest of the huge commercial mills who at present import Peruvian \*tops by the container load every month. There is an excellent demand for alpaca in the fashion and furnishings industries, because the fibre



is so strong, durable, flexible and above all, soft. An average alpaca will produce between 2.5 and six kilos of fleece a year, not all prime fibre. Selling to smaller outlets at present, raw fibre can make between £8 and £20 per kilo. \*Tops are part-processed alpaca fleece. With our most productive and finest alpacas we hope to make around £250 per fleece per year, by taking the raw fleece forward ourselves; adding value by processing it and selling it as complete garments.