

Alpacas - Livestock for the 21st century farmer

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We live in a world becoming greener by the day, green as it relates to an environmental conscious that is. Most modern consumers have an understanding of the concepts behind environmental sustainability & new catch phrases relating to environmental issues are populating our language at a rapid rate.

Carbon footprint, eco friendly, global warming and sustainable agriculture, are but a few of the newer members of the new dialect of environment, joining those more established terms like recycling and greenies.

Add to this growing environmental consciousness the desire by consumers to consider the welfare of the livestock that provide the raw products of fleece, leather, milk and meat to name but a few, and you have a farming environment like no other in the history of agriculture.

With global animal rights groups like PETA drawing attention to the practice of mulesing sheep & battery farming of chickens, severe economic consequences are occurring for farmers unable to adapt.

With some countries now banning imports of animal products whose husbandry involves such practices on the blacklist of animal rights organisations worldwide.

But all of these issues are something as alpaca breeders we look on from a distance.

We have livestock designed by nature to fit perfectly with the greener consciousness of the 21st century.

The eco friendly traits of alpacas are something as an industry we could better use to our advantage, by promoting alpacas as livestock suitable to Australian conditions, and appealing to the environmental groups whose influence is growing stronger each year. They in turn could lend their support to the promotion of alpacas as an environmentally friendly alternative to sheep or goats.

How can anyone fail to be impressed by the alpacas soft padded feet putting less pressure on our fragile soils than other livestock, and even our native animals?

At 39 kPA the static load weight of an alpaca is much better than sheep at 82 kPA, cattle at 185 kPA and man at 95 kPA, and even better than our native kangaroo coming in at 46 Kpa.



Their soft padded feet do not damage our shallow top soils like other harder hooved livestock and they do not rip out grasses damaging the roots, or ringbark trees, therefore compaction is less, fertility is maintained, less soil erosion occurs and less weed invasion is likely.

Alpacas do well on native grasses & as browsers they tend to select a variety of plants to eat, so biodiversity is maintained & since native pastures require less fertiliser this can in turn reduce waterway contamination from chemical run off.

The practice of alpacas to have communal dung piles that they tend to not graze around reduces worm burdens & therefore the need for chemical drenches is also reduced, and the ease of manure collection offers the opportunity for another side line to supplement farm income and improve soil fertility naturally.

Due to their clean breach and the lifting of their tail to urinate and defecate, they do not require crutching or mulesing, now a major issue for the sheep industry.

They tend not to suffer from fly strike or parasites like other livestock and this also reduces the use of chemicals in the farming process.

Their fibre is produced in a variety of natural colours lending itself perfectly to producing products from undyed fibre, a process which requires environmentally damaging chemicals.

The lower grease content in alpaca fibre also requires less chemical use in the scour process further enhancing its ability to appeal to the growing natural and organic markets worldwide.

So when you are next promoting the farming of alpacas, don't forget to mention they were 'green' long before the term was even adopted to represent the environmentally conscious!