

Fiber, Fiber everywhere..... Now What!!

Ok, shearing day is over and you have a garage full of fleece. Now what do you do? There are basically 3 options for your fiber in the USA. Send it to the American Coop, have it processed at a mini mill, process it yourself or a combination thereof. For the best solution ask yourself two questions. Where is my best return on my investment? How much time can I devote to the end result?

The American Coop (AFNCA) offers you alpaca products at wholesale cost. There is an initial cost of \$250 to join the Coop. You send them all or part of your fleece and in return you are eligible to receive products at wholesale cost. These products can be resold or given away as gifts. Your main cost for this option is the shipping of your fleeces to AFNCA. AFNCA is in the process of putting together collection points in an effort to eliminate this cost to the breeder.



The next option is sending it to a mini mill to have it processed into yarn, roving, batts or felt. Personally this is my choice because I get my own fiber back. I can assess how well I'm doing at breeding my animals for fiber. I also have a much easier time selling product that is produced at our ranch. It adds that personal touch. I liked this option so much that we purchased a mini mill and now provide this processing. Yes I'm a bit biased so take that into consideration. Once the product is returned to you from the mill you can sell it as is. Or add even more value to it by turning it into hats, scarves, socks, etc.

The 3rd option is to process the fleece yourself. I did this when we first started in alpacas. I would wash and then card the fleece. When I had just a couple of animals this was an option. It's very time consuming. But you do save the shipping and processing expenses. At some point you have to ask yourself just what your time is worth. I would spend countless hours carding my fleece to be made into felted hats. If I had known what I know now I would have sent the fleece off to be washed and carded. Then I could have spent more of my time doing what I really love like felting, weaving, etc.

So what can you make out of your own fiber? That is a question I ask myself everyday. I think the best thing to do is find your niche in the market. I know a woman that makes knitted felted hats. She traveled across country one summer and sold her hats where ever she went. The next thing you know she's got her self a business and she's actually knitting 20 hats per day! One possibility yet to be fully explored is felting. There are many things you can make with felt. The possibilities are endless. Here is the list that I started.

Can-Cozies	Hair Scrunchies	Place Mats
Cat Ball Toys	Hats	Pot Holders
Cell phone Holders	Horse Blankets	Rugs
Check Book Covers	Hydroponics Garden	Shoe Inserts
Christmas Stockings	Ipod Covers	Slippers
Christmas Tree Skirts	Jingle Felt Balls	Soap Covers
Coasters	Paper Weights	Table Runners
Cria Coats	Pet Beds	Water Heater Blankets
Door Draft Stoppers	Pillows	
Eyeglass Cases	Pin Cushions	

I'm sure if you start thinking about it you can add many items to this list.

The most import thing you can do with your fiber is to **get it out of the garage**. That doesn't mean moving it to the barn. My goal every year is to have all my fiber processed or sent off before the next shearing day. Did you know that fleece stored over 2 years will most likely become brittle and unusable? So my final word of advice is **"GET THE FLEECE OUT"!!**

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