

State of the Alpaca Address

by

David Barboza

AOBA Certified, Halter, Fleece and Performance Judge

What an exciting time to be an alpaca breeder! We are in the third decade of Alpacas in the United States and the national herd continues to grow. As a Judge the amount of improvement that I see is incredible with improvements to fleece as well as conformation. The growth of the mini mill industry and the products that they are producing are exciting to say the least. Brenda and I sent last years clip to a mill and received back wonderful throw blankets, this is the first year we have been able to see product out of our herd exclusively. Our fiber co-op the AFCNA has given us very high quality finished goods from the North American clip that is produced in North America; this is very exciting and needs to be supported.

Alpacas as a livestock industry is ready to take off and we as breeders have the opportunity to be part of it. As producers of seed stock (breeding stock) we are at the top level of our industry when it comes to traditional livestock. This means that the majority of our industry still has not been touched. As seed stock producers we lay the foundation for herds in the future. The improvements that we are seeing today will be the benchmark for production herds in the future. Future herds will trace their roots back to the work we are doing today that of producing fleece with the largest quantity while maintaining the highest quality. As we grow as an industry we stand ready to take on new challenges that of improving other breeding factors such as maternal characteristics and the overall health of the alpaca.

Alpacas are a wonderful animal to teach basic husbandry and handling skills to our youth. Interest is growing in the use of alpacas in youth programs such as 4-H and FFA. In Alpaca 4-H clubs members projects range from showing them in performance events to processing the fleece and designing garments made from hand processed alpaca fleece. Events such as Fiber on the Foot are often the first time that individuals see how the fiber industry operates taking fiber from the live animal and processing it to a finished end product. We are only beginning to tap into all of the end uses for alpaca fiber. My challenge to all breeders new and experienced is learn everything we can about the alpaca and be part of making alpacas into the world's finest fiber producing livestock!

David Barboza
RanchoNC Alpacas
Valley Springs, CA