

## *Small Mills in the Big Picture*

By Larry Sutherland

**Micro industry is the most efficient way to maximize the benefits of sustainable local resources and our Mini-Mills are proving to be an essential link in the value added sequence of processing that takes raw fiber to marketable products.**

There is a virtual framework of a domestic textile industry in as much as fiber is produced and clothing is purchased. Usually the segments of this industry are considered to be a series of separate activities, widely spaced in time and distance. This approach guarantees that primary producers are deprived of all the benefits of value added manufacture and final sales.

We recognize four discrete partitions; Production, Processing, Manufacture and Marketing. Production is the seasonal harvest of our sustainable resource from livestock. Processing is the conversion of the fiber to usable forms. Manufacture makes the yarn, etc into saleable garments and Marketing exports the products to consumers everywhere.

There are now enough successfully operating Mini-Mills for us to consider their potential to influence this domestic industry.

Mini-Mills began as a Carding service to sheep breeders, but as awareness of the availability increased they developed into sophisticated Spinning mills to serve the exotic fiber market.

Exotic fibers have never had the history of nation wide collection systems that were in place for sheep's wool. Instead, associations and co-operatives have tried to set some standards and dispose of the accumulation of small quantities of fiber contributed annually by members from the annual clip. Although this should have been a tremendous benefit for the small-scale producer, the results have not been

universally satisfying.

The challenge has always been lack of control over the value-added chain, control that can only be secured by a vertical integration of the entire process. This capability was inhibited by the investment required to set up a commercial mill. Beyond the milling, garment manufacture was feasible, but the hurdle was too high to clear.

The reality is a lack of a fair reward for the producers of any type of fiber and this is especially evident for the exotics that have a high price in the fashion markets and a low price at the farm.



Now Mini-Mills offer local processing as an alternative to bulk collection and disposal. The highest quality and completely unique yarns and other products are available for fiber artists and others on demand. This facilitates closing the gaps between producer and consumer and capturing the opportunities for profit that were denied under the only option previously available.

The mere existence of this alternative must change the playing field as the primary producers are no longer completely at the mercy of the wholesale markets and can withhold their fiber for either a higher price or the more attractive path to market.

Our company has a dual purpose of service to our customers and support and development of the wider industry. We believe that more mills do not

intrude on the market opportunities for mills already in place. Our experience is that the quantity of fiber available for processing is increasing exponentially and that the future of individual mills is directly related to the quality of their product, not to any lack of demand.

In our support of the industry we work with co-ops, associations, indigenous peoples, universities, governments and consultants. We are also encouraging the integration of Knitting and Weaving as expansion departments of our mills or as satellite businesses in the same locality.

For the person establishing a mill we would like to promote the concept of inclusion into a widening network of individuals co-operating to strengthen the industry by adopting standards for the fiber that they will accept and the descriptors of the end products that they make. As the impact of Mini-Mills is increasingly felt, such standards and co-operation will appear just as in other professional organizations. This situation does not yet exist, but there is considerable exchange and involvement among Mini-Mill owners through livestock shows and fairs and before and after new mills are set up.

In conclusion, we will only be satisfied when fiber, our renewable and sustainable resource, stays home instead of being exported for a pittance.

# Fiber PROCESSING

## MACHINES CURRENTLY IN PRODUCTION:

Picker, 2 sizes of Carders, Draw Frame, 2 sizes of Fiber Separators, Dehairer, 4 and 8 Spindle Spinners and Plyers, Feltmaker, Skeinwinder, Conewinder, Bumpwinder, Steamer and Fiber cutter.

For further information please contact by e-mail [larry@minimills.net](mailto:larry@minimills.net) and visit website [www.minimills.net](http://www.minimills.net)

This is the fourth in a sequence of published articles intended to be helpful in understanding fiber processing. Copies of earlier articles available on request.

## MINI-MILLS LTD.

*of Prince Edward Island, Canada offers mills around the world, configured to individual requirements, with on site installation and training.*

*With more than a dozen machines to choose from and various options and*

*enhancements available, a mill can be custom designed to meet almost any need.*

*Every animal fiber can be processed and spun as 100% or blends. Now Fibre Processing is reaching new heights of excellence to satisfy the fiber artists and garment makers in today's sophisticated markets.*

[www.minimills.net](http://www.minimills.net)

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Draw Frame



Picker



Spinner



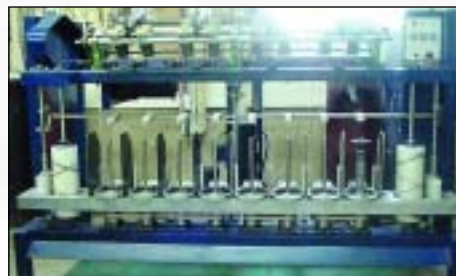
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Spinner



Skein Winder



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Felt Maker