

# You've Got Fiber... Now What?

## Exploring The Choices for Fiber Processing

By Dianna Jordan

**T**he shearing is finished, life is back to normal for your alpacas, and you find yourself surrounded by bags of your bountiful harvest. Now, what are you going to do with it? Fortunately, you have many choices available. As the number of alpacas in North America has continued to increase, so have the fiber processing options. Alpaca fiber producers can now choose from independently owned fiber processing mini mills, non-member owned fiber pooling cooperatives, and member owned AFCNA (Alpaca Fiber Cooperative of North America).

### **Fiber Processing Mini Mills**

Mini mills are just what the name implies...miniature versions of fiber production mills. By design they process smaller volumes of raw fiber, the processed goods are individualized to the needs and requests of the fiber producer, and the products returned are from the fiber submitted by the customer.

In answering the few simple questions (below), you may have discovered it is important to you to submit fleece from specific alpacas and receive finished product created from those alpacas. When sent to mini-mills, you control the outcome. You can request rovings, yarns, blends, felt, etc. You can ask for blends from two or more alpacas. Mini-mill owners will work with you to produce the products that work best for your needs.

If you are looking for personalized service, products made from the fiber of your own animals, and are willing to wait until your fiber can be worked into the mini mill schedule then using the services of a mini-mill is a good option for you.



If you don't know where to look for a fiber processing mini mill, a simple search for "Alpacas + Mills" on the internet will produce thousands of results.

### **Fiber Pooling Cooperatives**

Fiber pooling cooperatives are another option for fiber processing. Unlike mini-mills, when you submit your fiber production to a fiber pooling cooperative the products you receive will not be made exclusively from your alpacas. As the names suggest, the raw fiber is collected and then processed together.

If you have a ranch store and want to sell a variety of products from different sources, then sending your raw fleece to a fiber-pooling cooperative may be a good solution. The cost of purchased product varies depending on the individual organization and the agreements with the contributors. As the fiber producer, you determine what works best for your situation.

If you are not concerned with getting product back that comes from your own alpaca(s), want a variety of finished products to choose from, instant access to available products, and do not care to participate in the profits of the cooperative then this is a good option for you.

### **AFCNA (Alpaca Fiber Cooperative of North America)**

Incorporated in 1998, and based on one of the oldest agricultural business models, the Alpaca Fiber Cooperative of North America offers another option for alpaca fiber producers. When fiber producers become members, through



### **Determining your best option(s) begins with asking some key questions.**

Your answers will help guide you to the fiber processing choices that best meet your needs. Some questions to ask include:

- Does your business plan include a ranch/farm store? If so,
- Do you want to sell a variety of merchandise from different sources?
- Do you want to sell only fiber and fiber products produced by your own herd?
- Do you want to sell a combination of the above?
- Do you want to provide only "made in America from American fiber" products?
- Would you prefer to purchase, trade for "ready made" products, or create your own?
- How important is it to get back products created by your favorite alpaca(s) from your own herd?
- What is the size of your clip (number of bags, weight, etc.)?
- What is your budget for fiber processing?
- What is your anticipated ROI (Return On Investment)?
- Would you like to be a member of, and participate in, the profits of a fiber processing organization?

**Your answers to these questions will give you a good idea of which options, or combination of options, are best suited to meet your needs.**

the purchase of one voting share of AFCNA stock, they are eligible to participate in the profits of the business.

Member fiber is collected, processed, and manufactured into products. These products are marketed, distributed and sold through a network of farm stores and wholesale accounts. Additionally, AFCNA buys an assortment of products (or makes distribution arrangements with a select group of designers) that are available to members and wholesale accounts. AFCNA also sells directly to the public via the AmericasAlpaca.com web store.

### ***It's Your Choice***

Whether you choose mini mills, fiber pools/cooperatives, or the cooperative business model of AFCNA, choose to use one or a combination. How you choose to have your fiber processed is not an all or nothing, either/or situation. In answering the questions you have a good idea of the choices that best fit your needs. More than likely, you will see that a combination of fiber processing options will have value. You can personalize your production by using a mini-mill that will return products

from your own alpacas. You can expand the variety of products by sending your harvest to fiber pools/cooperatives. This is a good option for ranches with farm stores. Membership in AFCNA offers the selection and variety of fiber pools/cooperatives as well as the opportunity to participate in the profits of the cooperative.

Alpaca ranchers have a consistent product and that product is fiber. As you look at your bags of fleece stop for a minute and picture luxury clothing, warm wraps/sweaters/coats, toasty toes and warm heads. Picture quiet evenings turning yarn into a special gift for that special someone. Think about the flourishing fiber industry we are on the verge of creating and become part of that process by choosing to process your harvest and getting it into the hands of the consumer.



### ***About the Author***

*Dianna Jordan and her husband, Jack raise Huacaya alpacas at their ranch in Somerset, CA. Recently elected to the AFCNA Board of Directors, Dianna is passionate about the future*

*of the alpaca fiber industry. Her primary role and area of responsibility on the AFCNA Board is providing educational information and opportunities to AFCNA members and non-members. Please feel free to contact Dianna with any questions, concerns, suggestions regarding AFCNA. 530-620-6033 or dljordan@wildblue.net*

### ***About the Alpaca Fiber Cooperative of North America***

*AFCNA members are both owners and users of the cooperative. As owners, members elect a board of directors responsible for the day-to-day management of the business. Members have a market for their fiber and an organizational structure that makes, sells, and distributes products so they don't have to. Members can buy products made from member-contributed fiber, or products purchased by AFCNA specifically for resale, at a discounted member price.*

*AFCNA is headquartered at 17494 State Highway 58 N, Decatur, Tennessee where a small permanent staff provides cooperative administration, product manufacturing management, product sales & fulfillment (packing & shipping) and customer services. A 7 to 15 Member elected, volunteer Board of Directors guides AFCNA's business and finances. For more information about AFCNA visit the website: [www.afcna.com](http://www.afcna.com)*