



## NEWSLETTER: February 2009

### *It's been a Long, Long Winter.....*

If the amount of AD&E vitamin paste or haylage used is anything to go by this has been a long, long winter....well it did start during harvest! Having said that, the animals are in good condition and this last spell of cold weather seems to have really stimulated fleece growth. We have upped the Fibregest ration during the cold snap and newly weaned cria are also getting some chopped alfalfa to ensure they maintain their growth rates.



**Claudia enjoying her first snowfall.**

The prolonged wet weather, up to Christmas, resulted in a few of the animals (usually cria: whose pads are softer and generally have slightly lower immunity levels), developing abscesses on their feet, but a few days of TLC and a course of anti-biotic soon had them skipping around again.

We are planning to give our animals their Blue Tongue vaccination booster at the end of this month. That way they will be administered well before the midge population starts to wake up again and it should be during the 'safe' period for the pregnant females.

### *Neonatal Course*

We are determined to keep ourselves updated to ensure our animals have the best levels of care possible and that we are able to pass on good honest advice to our customers. Last year Paul attended the UK's first alpaca neonatal course given by Claire Whitehead of the Royal Vet School. Viki has just completed the

course too, so we are in good shape for the arrival of this year's cria.

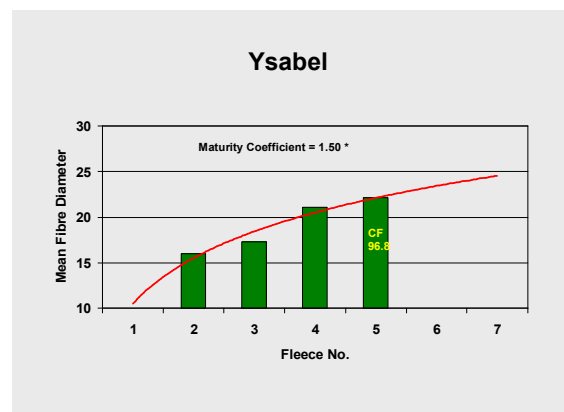
### *Breeding "Farmer Friendly" Alpacas*

Breeding for quality alpaca fleece is the aim of most UK alpaca breeders, but here at Melford Green we want to go one step further. Using a phrase from our plant breeding days, we want to breed *farmer friendly* alpacas. This doesn't mean that we aim to breed animals that are always pleased to see you (though some clearly are), but that they reliably produce top quality fleece.

As alpacas get older, their fleece tends to become coarser and have a lower comfort factor. However some animals have a greater inherent or genetic ability to maintain fleece quality compared to others.

Gwynne & Ysabel are part of our elite herd imported from Peru and had identical mean fibre diameter figures (16 microns) when selected at 2 years of age. However, the way in which they have held their fleece quality over the next three years is quite different.

Ysabel's Year 5 fleece had statistics of 22.1 microns with a comfort factor of 96.8% compared to Gwynne's year 5 fleece stats of 26.1 microns and 79.5%. From these figures we are able to calculate the maturity coefficient which defines the ability of the fleece to hold its quality over the years. We use these figures to rank the herd (the lower the figure, the more *farmer friendly* the animal), and in turn help us to define the next mating.



Where available all fleece details and maturity coefficients will be displayed (as above) in the breeding section of [www.melfordgreenalpacas.co.uk](http://www.melfordgreenalpacas.co.uk)

### *Postcard from Qatar*

It's always nice to hear how the new arrivals are settling in, but an e card that arrived on December 17<sup>th</sup> was

especially welcome. The previous day we had arrived at Heathrow at 5.00am to load Sean and 7 other elite alpacas into a specially built alpaca crate ready for their BA flight to Doha in Qatar.

It was the first UK export to anywhere outside of the EU since the Foot & Mouth and Blue Tongue outbreaks of 2007 and marked the first export under the new UK Export Certification Partnership (DEFRA: industry partnership). Months of negotiations with authorities and numerous health status tests were required to secure the necessary clearances, and with this being the first time alpacas had been exported to Qatar, authorities were quite rightly cautious. However, the 2007 Bluetongue outbreak in cattle & sheep added some extra complications.

We were arguably the first herd caught up in the movement order restrictions that followed the outbreak of Bluetongue in 2007 as the Baylham Rare Breeds herd, (where the first UK case of Bluetongue was identified), is only a few miles up the road from us. As a consequence, we were also one of the first herds to vaccinate; but thank goodness we did. One of the many conditions of the negotiated health certificate was that the animals had to be proven immune to Blue Tongue. (via a positive serological test for anti-bodies) and shown to be negative for the presence of the actual virus (PCR analysis).



*Wish you were here?*

**Sean & the girls, enjoying the high life in Qatar.**

All of our animals passed which not only means that the vaccine works but goes to show the importance of vaccinating all blue-tongue susceptible animals. Without it, we wouldn't have been able to fulfill this highly significant order.

We would like to thank our vets, Ben and John at Taylor & Lees and Stanford Livestock for their help.

### ***Elvis has now left the Building***

The alpaca that features on our logo is named after one of our best friends:- David. So when he reached a significant birthday this year (we will spare his blushes), we had an Elvis bear made from David the alpaca's fleece. Everything apart from the Rhinestones on the jumpsuit of David's favourite musical hero is made from one of our alpacas.



He was delighted with his totally original gift. If you, or someone you know would like a Melford Green bear call 01787 374142 / e mail [paul@melfordgreen.co.uk](mailto:paul@melfordgreen.co.uk).

### ***New Yarns are the best yet***

When we heard that Ruth Elvestad, Manager of the Natural Fibre Centre and founder of the Canadian Agri-Fibre Network, was flying in from Alberta to teach a course on alpaca fleece sorting, we were keen to take part. The course was a combination of technical information and real hands-on experience which added loads to our knowledge of alpaca fleece and its uses. This, coupled with our continued improvements in the breeding programme has resulted in the yarns spun from our 2008 fleeces being by far the best we have ever produced.

Grade 3 and Grade 4 knitting yarns in a range of natural and dyed colours are now available in 3 and 4 ply (DK). Why not pop into the Farm Shop on Saturdays (10.00am – 4.00pm) or if you prefer contact Becky at [www.yarnsmith.co.uk](http://www.yarnsmith.co.uk) where you will find all of our yarns online. Becky has also designed a range of knit kits exclusively for Melford Green yarns.

### ***Futurity 2009***

The show season opens this year on February 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> with the British Alpaca Futurity at the Royal Showground, Stoneleigh in Warwickshire. It's a good chance to see the top British bred animals, meet friends and weigh up the merits of future stud male choices. We're currently busy halter training our 2009 show team and hope Lenny, George and the rest of the crew all perform to their best on the day. Hope we'll see some of you there too.

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