

YOUR ALPACA BUSINESS AND FARMING GUIDE

Debby McCandless

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Due to the state of excessive libel suits in the world today, I, unfortunately, must add the following:

Limit of Liability

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About the Author

Debby McCandless, along with her husband Mike, started their alpaca farming adventure over seven years ago. We raised these amazing animals by hands-on-learning. Not a lot of information was available when we started and vets knew way less 7 years ago than they do today.

We have self-taught ourselves birthing, marketing, and fiber arts. For over a year now we have been learning the web site side of an alpaca business. We believe that alpacas are a viable industry and have successfully made money with this adventure.

To learn more about alpacas, visit www.owning-alpaca.com.

Making an income from part-time alpaca care

You can do alpaca care on a part-time basis but make a full-time income. Alpacas are hardy animals that require less attention than a lot of other livestock.

A lot of home businesses are hard to start-up while doing another full-time job. You can do your alpaca care in a very short time. The alpacas take care of themselves if you set things up properly.

First, get good fencing. Then you don't have to worry about predators killing your animals while you are gone. Loss of an alpaca is loss of income. # 1 in alpaca care is keep them safe.

Second, your daily routine can be very simple with alpaca care. Feed your animals, give them clean water, and you are done. Other than your daily chore, you will need to clip toenails every couple of months, worm your animals, and shear them once a year. All are simple to accomplish.

Your alpaca care should, also, include grooming pastures so your animals fleece will stay clean. You can sell that fabulous fiber to make additional income. The better your animals look, the more chance you have of selling them for that full-time income you are looking for.

With minimal alpaca care you can achieve full-time success. You will need to market your animals to get full-time results. The animals are cute, but without effort on your part, customers are not going to be storming down your doors to buy them.

Do your alpaca care in the morning before work and your marketing strategy planning in the evening while you are watching your very cool animals in your pasture.

See! Alpaca care is very easy and can be a profitable home business with less effort than many other home businesses.

Ask Yourself Questions Before You Invest

The alpaca industry is still in the early stage of growth. Are alpacas right for you? Here's ten questions to ask yourself before you buy.

1. Why do I want alpacas?

Do I want them because they're cute and it would be cool to have one on my property? Get a pet quality animal.

Do I want to spin the fiber for myself, family, and friends or start a fiber business? Get excellent fiber producing animals.

Do I want a business? Get middle to high quality alpacas.

2. What are my long term goals with an alpaca investment? Do I want a breeding business or a fiber business?

Select the right animal for the type of business you plan.

3. Am I in need of a quick buck or do I want a long term steady business?

Don't even think of an alpaca investment if you need a quick buck. This is a slow, long-term business to build.

4. What can I afford?

If you can afford to buy top quality breeding animals already producing high-quality offspring, go for it. If not, purchase mid-quality animals and breed for better quality in the next generation and the next until you have high-quality. Realize this will take longer.

What can I afford for equipment, shelters, etc.?

5. Do I have enough time to devote to animal care, showing, continually educating myself, and to the promotion of animals and fiber?

6. Do I have the perseverance and flexibility it takes to run my own business?

Instead of becoming discouraged at set-backs, you must look at each problem as a challenge to conquer and a lesson learned towards the betterment of your business.

7. Do I want a full-time or a part-time income?

Sell an occasional alpaca and develop an outlet for the fleece for a part-time income.
Run a full breeding business for a full-time income.

8. Do I have property or will I have to move or board my animals?

If you don't have a minimum of five acres to start, you will probably have to find someplace to raise your animals.

9. Do I like working with animals or will I hire someone else to maintain my herd?

The extra cost and overseeing of employees may not be for you. If you don't like working with animals and don't want employees, don't buy alpacas.

10. After researching the alpaca industry, do I believe in its long-term viability? Do I believe it has a future?

You must believe in the future of the alpaca industry to make an alpaca investment work. Understand the end goal is to produce luxurious fiber from these animals.

If you can give yourself a satisfactory answer to these questions, then you are on the road to determining if an alpaca investment is right for you.

Your Children Can Benefit, Too

Alpaca farming is a great family oriented business and can benefit your children in many ways, all of them positive. An alpaca farm can help your kids now and in the future.

Most children today live in larger cities and have minimal to no contact with farm animals. Alpaca farming is an ideal way to have them work with animals. Alpacas are gentle, intelligent, and small enough for a child to handle.

Children develop excellent behaviors when alpaca farming. Here are at least four benefits they will receive when working with alpacas.

1. They will learn compassion.
2. They will become better listeners.
3. It has been shown that children who work with farm animals do better in school.
4. They will develop morality.

Future Benefits for Children

Alpaca farming has far reaching benefits. Your child's future will be shaped by working on an alpaca farm. Check out these future benefits.

1. If your child obtains the four benefits listed above, he/she will become an honest upstanding citizen with integrity, compassion, and a great future because they did well in school. Don't we all want to make future generations better for our children? Alpaca farming could be the answer to developing a positive character in your child.
2. According to Austrian researchers, your child may be less likely to develop asthma and hay fever later in life if exposed to farm animals when they are young. They say 3-4 times less likely. That would be an awesome benefit.
3. If you are successful at alpaca farming, the financial rewards would be well worth owning alpacas. You would be able to send your children to college. A higher education means a brighter future for your child.

There are so many positive ways alpaca farming can influence your children both now and in the future. Maybe it would work for you and your family.

What About the Fiber an Alpaca Produces?

Alpaca fleece is sinfully soft and cuddly warm, but you can do more than wear it. You can create items from this fine fleece and sell those items.

A very hot fiber trend right now is felted knitted or crocheted handbags. Many celebrities, including Julia Roberts, are sporting purses made with this technique. You knit or crochet a purse and then you felt it in your washing machine. Alpaca fleece works great for this fiber trend. It felts nicely and makes a handbag that feels great to carry. The 22 natural alpaca colors that are available make very stylish purses without dyeing fiber.

Another trend is to needle felt. You use a barbed needle and dry felt all sorts of items. You jab the fiber with the needle until it tangles and felts. Handbags, hats, and 3d characters can all be made with alpaca fleece and felting needles.

Clothes made from alpaca fleece are appearing on fashion runways very frequently lately. Designers are loving alpaca. You can design your own sweaters, dresses, or other garments and sell them.

Where can you get alpaca fleece to cash in on fiber trends if you don't own alpacas, yet? Well, you could get it straight from an alpaca farm. Or you can get raw fleece on ebay. You can felt it or spin it into yarn. Or you can get ready made yarn from either of the two places previously mentioned.

Make your unique handmade items of excellent quality and you will be able to sell them. I find the local market to be most lucrative. Selling to people who can see and touch your product is best, but you can, also, sell on ebay or etsy.

Don't be shy about putting your product out there for people to see and feel. Every time I show my alpaca fleece products, I sell them. When people feel how soft alpaca fiber is, they just have to have some.

You can cash in on fiber trends, too. Get a little alpaca fleece and give it a try.

How Do You Find Customers?

Alpaca marketing does no good if you don't have targeted potential customers. Gathering names of people interested in alpacas is a very important step in marketing. Here are 12 ways to gather names.

1. If you advertise your alpaca business, people will call. When they call be sure and get their name, number, address, email, whether they plan on buying soon or not, and how they got your name.
2. Do you go to conventions or shows? Get other owners business cards. Don't forget about fellow alpaca owners in your alpaca marketing strategy.
3. Do you go to shows or craft fairs, etc.? Have a sign up sheet for people interested in alpacas to get more information mailed to them.

4. Do you have a physical place of business? Have a guest book for people to sign to get names for your alpaca marketing future.
5. Hang a flyer on bulletin boards with your phone number, offer to send information, and take their information when people call.
6. Put out surveys and make it optional for people to give their information. You'd be surprised how many people sign their names and address on optional appraisals. This can help your alpaca marketing in two ways. You get targeted information and feedback on how you are doing and what customers may be looking for.
7. Teach a class and keep the registration information. Or you could give a voluntary talk on something related to alpacas or their fiber and have a sign up sheet for anyone who wants to know more about alpacas.
8. Raffle off something made with lovely alpaca fleece and have people fill out a form with their information on it.
9. Keep a small notebook and a pen or pencil in a pocket or purse. Talk about what you do and when someone indicates they're interested, put their information in your notebook.
10. Place an ad in one of the local papers with a coupon for people to fill out to get more alpaca information.
11. Are you Internet savvy? Go to some of the social networks like Furl, Digg, etc. and talk about your alpacas. When someone becomes interested, get their info (at least an email).
12. Do you have a website that you can use for alpaca marketing? Have a guest book for people to sign or a contact form. This gives them the option of whether or not they want to give you information. Assure people their information will not be sold and don't sell it. No one likes to be spammed.

Alpaca marketing requires a plan, but without a targeted market, you'll be wasting dollars and time. Gathering names will narrow the focus of who to target. Don't forget to find out how they found out about you so you know which alpaca marketing method is working for you.

Building a Professional Website

Let's face it, most people who can invest in an alpaca farm...shall we say, are already having or close to having senior moments. Not too many young people can afford the price of an alpaca. We are not the generation that grew up on the Internet as our children have. So this aspect of an alpaca business can be scary to a lot of alpaca owners.

If you're Internet savvy, you can go for it. Those of us that need step-by-step instructions are left behind in the dust. There are so many web hosting services out there it will make your head spin. We were overwhelmed with the choices. As we continued our search for something that would work for us, we kept coming back to one that promised to provide that needed support for novices.

It is called Site Build It (SBI). They promised you could save time and money using their service. Finally, we decided to take the plunge a year and a half ago and started using their services. You can do-it-yourself (our choice and very do-able) or they have professionals that can get you going for extra cost.

Site Build It provides you with simple blocks to fill in with content and keywords. They help you figure out a profitable domain name, show you how to get traffic, how to pick profitable keywords, automatically submits your web pages to the search engines, have design templates, and shows you many different ways to generate income from your website.

A professional looking website is so important to your reputation. Your website must be easy to navigate and provide useful information. "Content is king" is a phrase you will read about if you are looking into building a website. The search engines decide whether you are a good website according to content on your web pages and who is linking to you. SBI teaches you how to get those important backlinks that make your website rank well so you can get traffic.

We could go on and on about how much Site Build It has helped us novices create a business website. If you are a novice like us, we highly recommend Site Build It. If you are not a novice, Site Build It is flexible enough that you can do your own thing, too. For us it took away a lot of the technical anxiety.

Follow this link if you would like to build your own [professional business website](#). A website can generate that extra needed income to keep your business afloat during a slow down. In today's world you really shouldn't be without one.