

Alpacas Popular livestock choice for a small block

In South America alpacas are mainly farmed in large herds but in New Zealand alpacas are fast becoming the animal of choice for the small block owner. Alpaca numbers in New Zealand are estimated to be around 4,000 with an average herd size of 6. With a stocking rate of 5 to the acre you don't need a high country sheep farm to be right up there in alpacas.

Lifestyle block owners are usually busy people, holding down regular jobs so alpacas appeal for their easy care. On the whole they are low maintenance and problem free animals, so it is no real surprise that alpacas are becoming so popular. They are great for family involvement, their gentle temperament means small children can handle them.

Alpacas are smart. They know the bucket means food, so when you want to bring them in or change the paddock simply go out into the paddock with a bucket and call. They will follow you anywhere.

A light animal with a soft padded foot means they have little impact on soil and pasture. There is no pugging and they don't make tracks like sheep. Alpacas are very adaptable and thrive all over NZ, they don't need any special requirements.

Communal dung sites that they don't eat around, not only means a low worm burden but a garden fertilizer which is easy to pick up from the paddock.

So what use is an alpaca? What do they do? The primary use of an alpaca is fleece. World wide there is a shortage of this high quality fibre which is likened to Cashmere. In New Zealand the small number of alpacas makes it only marginally viable as an investment for fleece alone. Although if you are willing to put in the extra work and maybe process your fleece yourselves there is a thriving cottage industry craft market in New Zealand.

Reasonable supplementary income is achievable from a small acreage, by selling progeny, and opportunities exist for further processing of the fleece. Investment remains stable as numbers are slow to increase, having one cria [baby] a year at the most and they are not artificially bred.