

Why Exhibit Your Llama Fiber?
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Why? It's fun, exciting, educational, and is a great marketing tool for your farm.

Where do I start?

If you have one llama, or a herd of llamas, you have fiber. There are many exciting ways you can exhibit your fiber and many willing fiber enthusiasts that will help you in your new adventure.

A great place to start is to visit the ALSA (Alpaca Llama Show Association) web site <http://www.alsashow.net/fiber.html>) where you can find a listing of fleece shows and fleece clinics. The ALSA handbook has a complete fiber section outlining the criteria for entering classes. As the fiber industry is growing rapidly more shows are adding shorn and walking fleece classes that allow farms to showcase their fiber. Beautiful handspun skeins, knitted, crocheted, felted and woven items are just another way of exhibiting your llamas' luxurious fiber. Many local fiber and wool shows also have various unique classes in which you can exhibit your fleeces and your handmade fiber items.

In 2003 I entered my first shorn llama fleece at the Ohio State Fair fiber show. Throughout the day I would curiously walk by and take a peek to see if the ribbons had been placed. To "finally" walk by and see a ribbon on my entry that I had worked so hard on was one of the highlights of owning llamas. Not a first place this year but a placing. The judge was so willing to take time to go over the score card and give suggestions on how to make my preparation of the fleece better. "What's skirting I ask her? "How do you not have second cuts" was my next comment? The judged smiled and took the first place fleece and put it on the table for me to view. When I saw that beautiful shiny fleece looking like a piece of art work my decision was made to not only learn more about llama fiber in general, but to someday become a fleece judge.

The next year we sent fleeces to the Grand National fleece show. A comment on the score card noted that the fleece was "over brushed". Well of course it was over brushed; I had to score a "perfect 10 points on cleanliness". This comment inspired me to want to learn and understand more about the bags of fiber taking up every inch of spare room in our house.

What have I learned?

By attending fiber workshops and clinics I have learned that all llama fiber can be used for some project, from rugs to beautiful handspun yarn to magnificent felted wall hangings. Garments, purses and needle felted embellishments have created a new market for the bags of fiber that once only took up space.

Learning that the quality of llama fiber can be affected by environment, nutrition, health of the animal and stress has encouraged our farm to take a different approach in our breeding program. Taking time to learn about how to produce quality fiber will enhance your fiber production and give you quality products to sell and exhibit. There are many fiber enthusiasts who will help you evaluate your herd as to the type of fiber and quality that each of your llamas exhibits.

Grooming is important before you harvest your fiber. The cleaner the llama, the less time you will need to prepare your fleece for its intended use. Now with the addition of the walking fleece competition; which allows the spectators to be more involved, fiber has become an important asset to the llama community. Fiber shows, new spinning, weaving and felting guilds are experiencing a growth in many states. In 2004 we started a local fiber arts guild to meet other spinners in our area; we now have 40 members who enjoy learning and sharing each other's special skills. Check for local guilds or yarn shops in your area and become part of this worthwhile experience.

As a result of my love for our llama fiber I am now a spinner, felter and knitter. As an ALSA llama fleece apprentice judge my dream is almost complete. You too can dream. When you shear this year think about entering your fleece or a handspun skein, maybe a beautiful felted or knitted item. There are so many people in our llama family who would be honored to be your mentor in learning more about how to prepare and use your llamas' fiber. Host a fiber clinic or workshop at your farm; fiber judges are eager to share their expertise with others. Have a skirting party; they bring the skirting table and show you how to build your own. You can learn what to do with your fiber from start to finish.

There are many websites you can visit to learn more about how to properly groom your llama and prepare your fleece for showing. So let's get busy and shear those llamas and send an entry to a show. Experience is the best teacher.

See you and your beautiful fleece entry soon!