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TODAY

Local Ag

Dryden Twp. farmer has a touch of the Andes

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DRYDEN TWP. — Philip Fisher grew up on a farm, so when his wife, Connie, decided she wanted to do something in agriculture he said, “Anything but chickens.”

Connie settled on Alpaca and today Fort Fisher Suri Alpacas has 38 of the animals. Entrepreneurs began importing the deer-sized animals to the U.S. about 1980 for their fiber. Initially the primary way of making money on the exotic animals was selling breeding stock to other farmers, but Connie said between selling fiber and finished products, the animals make a pretty good side business for the family.

She saw her first alpaca at Lapeer’s Family Fun Day in 2007 and was fascinated by the fiber. The farmer at Family Fun Day, she recalled, had Huacayas, one of two breeds of alpaca.

She, however, decided to get Suris, a finer fiber variety. “It’s a more luxurious fiber,” Connie said. “One-thousand years ago only Inca royalty could wear it.”

Even today, she said, only about 10 percent of alpacas in the U.S. are the Suri breed. Each animal produces about five to 10 pounds of fiber a year

and it sells unprocessed for about \$25 a pound.

Connie hand sorts hers and sends most of it to a mill in Frankenmuth to be turned into roving and yarn. Some of the rest she sends to a company which uses it to produce socks, which she sells in the store in the basement of her Secord Lake Road home.

Four of Connie’s five home-schooled sons work with the alpacas. Her oldest graduated before she got them and two of her sons worked their way through college working as alpaca shearers.

Connie said the animals are fairly easy to care for. She said they don’t eat much and since they come from the Andes Mountains in South America, they only need a three-sided shelter to protect them from the wind. She keeps two shelters to separate the males from females.

Along with yarn and roving, Connie sells finished sweaters, socks and other items from her store and a few times a year at the Birmingham farmers market.

Connie holds a few farm tours and special events in the summer and fall and her store is open by appointment.

To learn more, call her at 248-628-8151 or email her at info@fortfisher-suris.com.



Connie Fisher shows off some alpaca fiber straight from the animal.



Connie Fisher said her 38 alpaca don’t require a great deal of care and are sheared once a year, like sheep.



Connie and Philip Fisher keep 38 Suri alpaca on their Dryden Township farm. The animals produce close to 200 pounds of fiber a year — not enough for a self-sustaining farm, but a pretty good side income.



Connie displays some of the alpaca yarn to local crafters.

Photos by Phil Foley



Connie Fisher shows off one of the trophies her animals have won for the quality of their fiber. Suri alpaca fiber was once reserved for Inca royalty.



Connie shows some of the alpaca fiber ready for sale.



A Christmas tree covered in alpaca fiber ornaments graces Connie Fisher’s home shop for the season.