

**Maine Alpaca Association
Membership Meeting
Saturday, March 19, 2011
Great Wall Restaurant, Augusta, ME**

Present:

Jeannine Anderson, Gaze Acres Alpacas; John & Lois Brace, Dream on a Stream Alpaca Ranch; Jennifer Caldwell-Jeans, Puckerbrush Alpacas, LLC; Nicole Carter, Upper Farm Alpacas; Pamela Drew, Pamelamas LLC; Robin Fowler & Corry Pratt, Northern Solstice Alpaca Farm; Carol & John Furman, Carrageen Alpacas; Geri Gabriel, Lakeside Alpaca Farm; Pam Harwood, Longwoods Alpaca Farm, LLC; Pat & Lisa Houde, Alpaca Fields, Inc; Paula Ickeringill, Sea Hill Farm Alpacas LLC, Connie Laliberte, Misty Acres Alpaca Farm; Sheila MCDonough; Falling Star Farm; Pat Perry & Bruce Weymouth, Fox Hill Alpaca Farm; Janis Piper, Alpacas of Unity; Dick Porter, Spudland Alpacas, Inc; Claudia & Ken Raessler, SuriPaco Farm; Darlene Reardon, Full Moon Alpacas; Ginny Rebar, OutBaca Alpaca; Marie Ring & Kendall Hanna, Sandy River Alpacas LLC; Pam & Shawn Randall, Christmas Farm Alpacas; Jim Roberts, Namaste Alpaca Farm LLC; Laila Roukounakis, Graceland Alpaca Farm; Alan Russo, Maine Alpaca Barn; Ann Sylvester & Tony Cortigene, Royal Criations Alpacas; Ricki Waltz, Two Sons Alpaca Farm; Jan & Craig Wanggaard, Farm in the Meadow; Tamilyn Wayboer, Shadow Hill Alpacas; Erin Weintraub, Cloud Hollow Farm; Ky Wolterbeek, Apple Tree Alpacas; Karen Woods, Maine Woods Alpacas.

10:45 – 11:15 Members were greeted and given meeting handouts.

11:15 Robin Fowler called the meeting to order welcoming members, explaining the agenda for the meeting and asking each member to introduce themselves and state their personal goal for the day. It was also reported that membership had doubled in the past eight weeks.

Group norms were agreed upon as the accepted ways of working & communicating in our membership meetings.

GROUP NORMS

- Use Agenda and Facilitator
- Actively Listen
- Practice Effective Feedback to the Intended Receiver
- Respect for Others
- Come to the Meeting Prepared
- Stay on Track – Utilize a Timekeeper
- Leverage Individuals' Strengths
- Raise Concerns with the Intent to Resolve
- Contribute as Much as Possible

12:06 Lunch

12:56 Reconvene

Business updates included information on the new MAA pop-up display that has been ordered and the tabletop display that was set up at the front of the room.

Al Russo shared information about NELE, the upcoming Northeast Livestock Expo trade show. It will take place May 21 -22.

Karen Woods reported on Fiber Frolic. MAA sponsors the event. We will have a full-page ad and a booth. We will need volunteers to work in the MAA booth. Volunteers are also needed for the fair in general and should speak to Karen. The indoor booth spaces are filled, but there is still booth and stall space available in the barns.

Tami Wayboer will organize a MAA presence at the Cumberland Fair again this year in the fall.

A stage of Group Development model was discussed. We are a group with many talents and experiences. Leadership, collaboration, communication and goal setting can move us to maturity.

After a recap of farm visits and consolidated goals, 4 small working groups were formed to prioritize those goals. As a result of the Board of Directors' interviews with approximately 80% of the MAA membership, a set of seven goals was derived. They were as follows:

- Optimize & Update website
- Maine Alpaca show or event
- Increased membership/Tiered
- Membership benefits - Discounts, welcome packet for new members, end products etc...
- Maine branded product - Made in Maine /Grown in Maine
- Learning & educational opportunities - Directed at outside world, getting children involved
- Marketing outreach & Branding - Tradeshows, fairs, agricultural events

Each group was asked to discuss these goals and select/prioritize the 4 goals that they felt the organization should direct their energy immediately. Each group presented the results of these discussions, as follows:

*One group selected

- Optimize & Update website

With the comment/recommendation that this is the means to the end (have to have this to accomplish the other goals). Other groups, although not choosing this as a primary goal, had comments and suggestions regarding this goal.

The following comments and suggestions were made with respect to this goal:

The website address should be printed on all of our materials (letterhead, membership cards, etc.)

This goal would require the least number of people, shortest period of time, and largest return on investment

Want the ability for farms to update their farm information readily

Want to have updated links and better information – more up to date educational content.

Want to have a location to advertise items/consignment

****All four groups selected

- Marketing outreach & Branding - Tradeshow, fairs, agricultural events

The following comments and suggestions were made as to how this goal could be accomplished:

Utilize tools such as VisitMaine.com website

Tie into Learning and Education piece with respect to a presence at events

***Three groups selected

- Learning & educational opportunities - Directed at outside world, getting children involved

The following comments and suggestions were made as to how this goal could be accomplished:

Utilize schools

Scouting events

Use a point person

Use our existing budget

Invite someone from 4H

Advertise

Create a learning packet

After school programs

Big Brother/Big Sister

Internships

****All four groups selected

- Maine branded product - Made in Maine /Grown in Maine

The following comments and suggestions were made as to how this goal could be accomplished:

We need to use/sell our fiber

We should be getting our (MAA members) fiber into a product that can be made economically and that we can sell – can't do this individually

*One group selected

- Increased membership/Tiered

*One group selected

- Membership benefits - Discounts, welcome packet for new members, end products etc...

*One group selected a combination of the two goals listed above, citing that they went hand-in-hand

*One group selected

- Maine Alpaca show or event

With the suggestion that this should at least be in the long-range plan, knowing the effort required to pull this together

After a 5-minute break, the meeting reconvened.

Claudia Raessler reported on Alpaca United and presented her ideas and interests in producing a ME alpaca product. Best to start with one quality product. One possibility is a blanket that would be 70% Maine made and would wholesale for \$60-70. 500-1000 pounds of 23 – 27 micron fiber would be needed to make one run of blankets, which would be a 70/30 blend. Questions should be directed to Claudia. A commitment to participate would be needed by June to have blankets available in November/December.

Small working groups were formed to continue the initial group work. The seven goals were narrowed down to four. They were as follows:

- Optimize & Update website
- Maine Branded Product - Made in Maine /Grown in Maine
- Learning & Educational Opportunities - Directed at outside world, getting children involved
- Marketing Outreach & Branding - Tradeshows, fairs, agricultural events

Attendees were then asked to divide themselves up into 4 groups, based on their interest in one of these goals. The groups discussing learning & educational opportunities and marketing outreach & branding were asked to consider how their topics could be tied into increased membership and membership benefits.

The groups were asked to discuss how many people would need to be involved in a focus group and if a Directorship should be established for this goal, what kind of budget would be required, and the timeframe that would be needed to accomplish the goal. After meeting, the groups reported out the following:

Optimize & Update website

The group determined that:

- This goal would require a focus group of at least 4-5 people, but any more than 8 people would be too many.
- A new Directorship on the Board would not be necessary at this time, but there should be a liaison to the Board.
- Once the site is done, it should be managed by a rotating webmaster – so it needs to be in a format that the general membership can work in.

- This work should be completed by summer, but the existing site should be kept up in the interim.
- The budget cannot be determined without further research but any work to be done on creating a new website should be put out to bid.
- Some regional research has already been done – reviewing other sites for ideas.
- Other sites should be researched for format suggestions – NEAOBA, Wisconsin Cranberry Assoc., etc.
- Want the ability for farms to update their own profiles.

Maine branded product - Made in Maine /Grown in Maine

The group determined that:

- This goal would require a project manager working with a focus group of 3 people.
- Would look at creating the branded product in year 1 and selling the product in year 2.
- Product should be simple and straightforward – such as a throw.
- Would need quality control to have a consistent product.
- Need a fiber collection site – such as at the Fiber Frolic

Marketing outreach & Branding - Tradeshows, fairs, agricultural events

The group determined that:

- This goal would require 1 coordinator/liaison to the Board and 6 people dedicated to specific tasks, to include:
 - National Promotion
 - Fairs & Festivals
 - Open Farm Weekends
 - Budget
 - Designers – for Branding
 - Social Media Outreach
 - Possible Opportunities through the Chamber of Commerce
- They will need a budget, as yet not determined, for marketing.
- Want to get people to Maine and to buy Alpacas
- Branding – suggestions and ideas:
 - Bumper stickers
 - Exclusivity
 - Branded Products with stickers/slogans
 - Tagline – possibly a MAA Member contest to determine
- Will need to look at demographics and use seasonal targeting – 4 seasons in Maine – anytime is a good time to visit a Maine Alpaca Farm

Learning & educational opportunities - Directed at outside world, getting children involved

The group determined that:

- This goal would require a group of 4 to 6 – with an interest in education and communication.
- Will need a budget for start-up – to be determined
- Target adults, children and families
 - Adult Ed – business opportunities
 - Organizational Groups
 - Tie in with Big Brothers/Big Sisters
 - Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts
 - YMCA groups
 - Special Olympics
 - Schools
 - Summer school – field trips
 - Field Trips or classroom visits/presentations
 - Tie in with 4H
 - Alpaca Show like the old fashioned sheep show
 - Obstacle course
 - Dress up Alpacas with awards
 - Use geldings as pets for kids
 - AOBA has a 4H curriculum for ages 8-16
- Make a brochure to send out to schools, after school groups, etc. telling about Alpacas and suggesting that they contact an area Alpaca Farm
- Open Farm Days at various times when 2 or 3 area farms announce an open farm weekend – not just when the State or National events occur.
- Tour bus – sell tickets for a bus tour to 3 or 4 area farms – providing information/education during the ride between farms. The farms will know when to expect the people and how many are coming so they can be more prepared.

Next meeting – the group agreed to leave it up to the BOD to decide and send out notice of the next membership meeting.

Forms were filled out giving feedback on the day.

In the future meetings will end with a time to share individual areas of focus.

The meeting adjourned at 3:58.