



MAA e-Newsletter

December 2008

Sent via the Yahoo group as text html from the Board of Directors

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1. Feature Article

Deep Bedding

by Jill McElderry-Maxwell of Bag End Suri Alpacas

Deep bedding is a management technique pioneered in Europe, notably in Sweden where it is required by law in hog production operations. In essence, several tons of bedding are provided over the course of the winter, with fresh bedding applied to soiled areas daily. The bedding is allowed to accumulate in the animal living quarters, where it begins the composting process, adding heat to the barn during the winter months. Properly managed, deep bedding is almost odorless, provides a soft and warm substrate for animals, and produces nearly finished compost when removed in the spring.

While alpacas are not pigs, many of the same principles applied to the hog production systems can be used with alpacas or other animals. At the beginning of the winter season, a thick layer of straw (6") is spread over the interior of the barn. It is important to use straw, rather than waste hay, as the primary bedding as the straw will break down into smaller pieces as the alpacas move through it. Hay will tend to mat and does not compost as well as straw.

If you have a soil floor, the drainage is typically adequate as is; if you have an impermeable surface, you may wish to consider first spreading a layer of Dry Stall or similar product to absorb the initial moisture. Rather than removing soiled straw daily, the dung piles are spread across the interior and fresh straw is applied over the manure and any wet spots. I find that sprinkling a small amount of Stall Dri or Sweet PDZ across the bedding daily also helps to control odor.

Pigs help the decomposition of their bedding along by rooting in it, thus allowing air to penetrate into the growing bedding pack. If you have free range poultry, they will eagerly take the place of the pigs. If not, it is a good idea to fluff up the top of the bedding pack with a pitchfork as part of your daily routine, prior to laying down new straw.

When the system is working well, there is little to no odor. If you can smell ammonia build up, you need to apply more fresh bedding. If space constraints are an issue, you may also consider removing some, but not all, of the soiled straw each day to slow the accumulation of the bedding pack and limit how much new bedding needs to be applied. Proper ventilation is also important for the composting process.

In the spring, once the weather warms, be prepared for a serious clean out to make up for all the time you saved over the winter (but wouldn't you rather spend the day outside when it's warm?) All of the bedding material needs to be removed, and much of it can go straight into the garden, although some may need further finishing. You can then clean and disinfect the barn for spring and summer.

I have used this technique for years with chickens, with no increase in parasitism or problems with ventilation. Last year I also bedded my alpacas using the method described above, and had clean, healthy animals. This year, our alpaca numbers have tripled, but I will be using deep bedding again. I just placed my straw base down, and am still removing most of the manure on a daily basis. Once the snow begins to fly, though, I will be leaving it in place and letting the composting begin!

2. News

Cindy Kilgore, Livestock Specialist, Maine Department of Agriculture. At our last meeting, we had the pleasure of meeting Cindy Kilgore, who spoke briefly about who she is and what she does. She has been in this position since January. Her responsibilities include visiting farms throughout the State, acting as liaison between the livestock community and the Department of Agriculture, working with the livestock associations, aiding with the two spring livestock expositions, weighing livestock for the fairs and the feeder calf sales, promoting the rural rehabilitation loan for feeder calves, and handling livestock questions asked of the Department. She brings a varied background to the job. As a prior agent of farm insurance, she worked with farmers on risk analysis, claims, and building / livestock / equipment values. She has weighed livestock at Crosman Auction in Corinna and traveled the State with livestock dealers. Cindy lives in Jay with Norris Smith. They raise dairy replacement heifers and sheep, own several alpacas, donkeys, and horses. She has also had her hand in raising hogs and rabbits. She and Norris raise, train and show steer and oxen at many of the fairs in central Maine.

Cindy currently serves as a director on three agricultural associations. As livestock specialist and agricultural promotions coordinator, she meets with the various livestock groups to determine their needs. She feels it is important for the groups to be associated with the spring Expos to increase their visibility to the public. Cindy has recently completed three days of Technical Large Animal Emergency Response training. This will enable her to work with fire/emergency personnel to handle livestock in a disaster. She has also assembled a livestock first aid kit and is giving group presentations on Disaster Preparedness.

Cindy can be reached at:

Cell: 215-4968

Email: cindy.kilgore@maine.gov

Alpaca Open Farm Weekend. Despite the weather, the weekend of September 27-28 was a reasonable success for most participants, due in great measure to the PR campaign launched this summer. The cost was underwritten by MAA as well as participating farms. Farms submitted information to Jane Tholen of Tholen Associates in Falmouth, and she in turn sent it (with photographs, a fiber sample and lots of background information on alpacas and alpaca farming in Maine) to the daily, weekly and monthly media calendar listings editors as well as to all the feature editors. She followed up with phone calls to assure us of as much coverage as possible, and for a few weeks there were alpacas, alpacas, mentioned everywhere! Jane will be at our January Meeting to present the wrap-up and to answer any questions about the campaign.

Pen Sales in Maine Back in mid-March the Raesslers of Royal River Alpaca Co in North Yarmouth hosted their 2nd Annual Pen Sale, and just recently the Lavan Family of Chase Tavern Farm in Bowdoin hosted their first hopefully-Annual Pen Sale. Both events gave smaller farms the opportunity to present their best alpacas to prospective buyers outside of a Show. Mainers and folks from away who are either looking to expand their herds or join the ranks of alpaca owners were given the opportunity to meet the alpacas and their owners in a relaxed atmosphere, and many of the alpacas were females with crias at side — something you won't find at shows.

Agricultural Council of Maine. On Tuesday, November 25th, at the invitation of Don Hoenig, DVM, the State Veterinarian, Claudia Raessler, Christy Hemenway and Pam Harwood represented MAA at a meeting of the Agricultural Council of Maine. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) is nosing about in the vicinity of “Best Management Practices” (BMP) and so, it’s generally agreed that to be proactive, and not be forced into a legislated version, Dr. Hoenig is compiling “best management practices” for all the relevant species. The information will be referenced in the BMP manual. Dr. Hoenig has received the Camelid Care Committee’s information, which includes a guide for veterinarians who are investigating cases of camelid neglect or abuse. All of this information is available at <http://www.camelidcare.info/>.

As part of the Council’s agenda, Andrew Marshall, Maine Organic Farmers and Growers’ Education Director, spoke to the group about “Recruiting, Training, and Supporting New Farmers”. MOFGA has a number of programs and opportunities in place which we can tap into even though we are not strictly Organic farmers. More information can be found at www.mofga.org, but a summary of his talk follows.

The Challenges facing farming in Maine are:

- The aging farmer population – who will be the next generation of Maine Farmers?
- Conversion of farmland
- Loss of local agriculture and infrastructure services
- Perception of farming as a non-viable career path.
- Lack of education and training mechanisms – where will the new farmers learn to farm?

The Opportunities for farming in Maine:

Demand is rising for local products -- Growing local produce/product offers more opportunity for farm enterprise viability.

MOFGA has New Farmer Programs:

- Access to education and training
- Access to land
- Access to capital/credit

The Farmer to Farmer Model is a Farm Apprenticeship Program – LEARN by DOING. Farmers and Apprentices complete a 5-page application, and there is a web-based system for matching apprentices with farmers. The typical applicant is young, well-educated, and comes from a non-farming background. 60% are women. [Other than age, this fits our new Alpaca Owner!]

MOFGA also provides model contracts, an apprentice handbook, networking, mentoring training, and annual meetings for mentors. MOFGA also runs weekly meetings as systemic training for farmers and apprentices – actually, these are open to anyone.

Andrew is working college undergraduates at Unity College, offering an Introduction to Farm Apprenticeship, and at Colby, offering Sustainable Agricultural Economy to introduce students to the idea of farming.

UMaine’s Sustainable Ag Program has 110 students in Livestock and 20 in Sustainable Agriculture.

After the Apprenticeship, there is a 2 year “Journey person” program. MOFGA works with FarmLink to help the Journey person find access to land and mentorship, as well as MOFGA courses, meetings and workshops.

MOFGA has a Farmer-in-Residence program at Common Ground. This is a 2 year commitment. Farmers are provided with housing, land and shared equipment.

Other ideas “out there”:

- Incubator farms
- Individual Development Account Savings Matching Programs
- Aggressive farmland protection and transfer strategies
- Public and private partnerships.

Andrew wrapped up by saying the reality is that new farmers need about 5 years to build a sustainable business. Time allows for experimentation, but many continue to rely on off-farm income. Sound familiar?

Have You Any Wool? When several members of the Maine fiber community read in the recently reported Agricultural Creative Economy study that “no statistics were found for fiber and fiber products or other non-food value-added products direct from the farm,” they decided to survey the Maine fiber community to get at some of those statistics.

The survey is being sponsored by the Heart of Maine RC&D, Maine Fiberarts, the Page Farm & Home Museum and WAgN, with assistance from the Maine Department of Agriculture. "Knowing the economic value of Maine's fiber industry will help bring technical and financial resources and recognition to Maine's small scale farm businesses and highlight trends in consumer interest and buying patterns. We are glad to have the cooperation of the Maine Department of Agriculture in this venture," said Tessa Burpee of the Heart of Maine RC&D.

If you are a fiber producer, processor, retailer, artist, or buyer, please take the survey to help in gathering this important information to include in an integrated message about the whole creative economy, develop marketing and business planning initiatives, pursue technical and financial resources for small and beginner farmers and support farmland preservation. All information gathered is anonymous.

You can access the survey electronically at <http://www.getrealmaine.com/fiber>; click the link that says "Take the survey now." Contact: Heart of Maine RC&D, at 207 947- 6622 x 137 for paper copies of the survey or assistance with access to the website.

2009 Agricultural Trades Show: January 13-15, 2009 (Tues-Thurs) will be the Department of Agriculture's 68th Annual Agricultural Trades Show at the Augusta Civic Center (http://www.getrealmaine.com/visit/trades_show.html). MAA will once again be participating with a booth (this year we have moved up to the second row!) and we will also be hosting workshops/seminars courtesy of the efforts of our Marketing Committee. . In addition to selling alpaca socks from the coops, we'd like to display wares that have been made from our own alpaca fiber: yarn, rugs, throws, duvets, knit and woven garments, etc. The Trades Show has over 100 vendors covering all aspects of Maine agriculture and they also offer many free workshops & seminars. The Show is open to the public and is free of charge. There is an on-site cafeteria as well. Volunteers to set up, breakdown, Staff MAA's booth and help with the seminars will be needed over the 3 day period; 2-, 3- and 4-hour shifts are available. Please contact Raini Perry, 993-2025 (leave a message) or lcblowers@hotmail.com with your availability for the show.

ID Me - This program is being funded by the USDA and handled by Peter Barengo of the Department of Agriculture, State of Maine. If a disaster occurred, would you be able to identify your animals? That is one of the questions Peter poses to the people he talks with on a weekly basis. For additional information, questions or to register your farm, please contact him at peter.barengo@maine.gov or 287-7627.

3. Leadership

Nominating Committee: It is that time of year again to search for the following year's BOD members. Volunteers for this important and vital committee are requested at this time. The committee consists of usually 3 or more current MAA members. The search for candidates over the past few years has been done via the telephone and over the internet and only requires a few hours worth of time. If you are interested in serving on the committee, please contact one of the current BOD members.

2009 Board of Directors: The Nominating Committee will be busy over the next month or so canvassing members in search of candidates for the 2009 MAA Board of Directors. There are 3 Board Seats up for re-election this year. Each term is for 2 years. There was confusion because Amy Grant, Pam Drew and Pat Houde were all elected to one year terms to fill the remainder of unexpired terms for Board members who had resigned. Candidates are requested to fill out a small questionnaire about themselves; which is then sent to the membership prior to the election. Members are elected to the BOD at the January meeting and the officers are selected by the BOD at their first meeting. New this year, as voted upon at the September meeting, is BOD members will have a complimentary membership while serving. BOD members have at least 4 meetings per year and will schedule more as needed. We have been very fortunate over the past 5 years to have so many members with various skills and backgrounds serving. We hope you will be one too! Please contact a current BOD member or one of the Nominating Committee members if you are interested or have any questions about the commitment.

4. MAA Membership Renewal

This is a friendly "first reminder" that your 2009 membership is renewable by December 31, 2008. Membership dues are \$75.00, payable to MAA. Please mail to: MAA c/o Pam Drew, PO Box 1139, Kennebunkport, ME 04046.

Membership Drive: 2009 will mark the 5 year anniversary of the Maine Alpaca Association. Since its first year, MAA has grown from about 30 member farms to a current membership of 68 with a peak of 72 in 2006. The growing alpaca industry in Maine reflects in this growth however we are seeing many alpaca farms, owners & enthusiasts not as members. Holding a membership drive would be a way to inform these folks of our Association. We will hold our first membership drive early in 2009 in an effort to incorporate these farms into MAA.

5. Communication

The BOD exists to serve you and one of our goals again this year has been to provide for quick and effective communication. You can expect to find minutes from BOD and Membership meetings posted to the website as well as distributed via the Yahoo list as soon as they are available. In addition, we will be sending this e-newsletter to members of MAA and other interested parties -- ideally on a quarterly basis.

If you have a question, concern, idea, or wish to have an item included on our agenda, please feel free to call/email individual Directors. However if you wish your message to be received by all directors simultaneously (and even sent anonymously if necessary) you may go to the Members section of the MAA website, and near the top of the page you will see [click here to send a message to all BOD Members](#)

The Maine Alpaca List on Yahoo.com is a critical tool for us to communicate amongst each other. As a reminder, we are re-posting the rules for the Yahoo List and will do this on an annual basis. Please remember the List is to be used for dispersal of relevant information and not for self promotion or business promotion in any manner. Use of this forum to disperse alpaca husbandry or health issues is encouraged. Please address any questions you have to a member of the MAA BOD and thanks in advance for your appropriate use of this valuable tool.

Instructions for using the Maine Alpaca Association Yahoo group

Any member of the group can send a message to all other members of the group by sending an email to MaineAlpaca@yahoo.com. In order to become part of the list, you must first go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/> to sign up. You will create a Yahoo ID and password. For some reason, I cannot find "Maine Alpaca" in the search for groups, but you can find go directly to <http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/MaineAlpaca/?yguid=197756078>. You must request to join and the moderator will accept you. It can take a few days, but in the meantime you can read the past messages by clicking on "view all".

This group may be used whenever you have an alpaca related question you want to ask the group or when you have information that you think the rest of the group should know about. Please use this forum to communicate about alpaca husbandry or health related concerns. **This group is not to be used for advertising purposes or self promotion of any kind.**

This group will also be used to send official MAA messages to the membership. If a meeting needs to be postponed due to weather, a message will be sent to this group before 8 am on the day of the meeting. If you receive an email from MaineAlpaca@yahoo.com and reply to that message your reply will be sent to all members of the group. If you want to respond privately to the originator of the message then you need to write a separate message addressed specifically to that person.

If you are having trouble accessing the Yahoo list, please contact Jill McElderry-Maxwell at jillmcm1970@yahoo.com or Al Maloney at newaim@midcoast.com for help.

6. Committee Help Wanted

In order for our committees to remain dynamic entities, and to keep the creative juices flowing, we encourage each member to sign up for a committee. You might not be able to attend all committee meetings, but your voice will be heard in online discussions. Not sure what you can contribute because you are "too new" to alpacas? Join a committee, listen, learn, and you'll be amazed at how quickly your past "outside" experience will help ideas to flow!

Education: Dawn Brooker, chair

The Education Committee is responsible for lining up guest speakers at MAA's 4 membership meetings, as well as organizing our annual Education Seminar.

Fiber Frolic: Al Maloney/Nancy Williams/Raini Perry, co-chairs

In 2007, MAA assumed stewardship of this small but growing annual fiber festival. MAA is working closely with the llama, goat, sheep, and bunny people to celebrate all things "Fiber" in the State of Maine.

Fundraising (Including Vet Fund): Marcia MacDonald

The Fundraising Committee is critical to the continued fiscal health of our organization!

Silent Auctions and raffles have added many thousands of dollars to MAA's coffers. We need to keep up the good work!

Website/Marketing: Nicole Carter

The Website/Marketing Committee is responsible for putting MAA's best foot forward through our website as well as local, regional, and national advertising and promotion, i.e. MAA's Open Farm Weekends, newspaper and magazine ads, show sponsorships, etc.

7. Website

Take advantage of the great opportunity to help gain exposure for your growing business and support the MAA Website. The MAA website is self-supporting, relying primarily on advertising revenue for its growth. Please support one of MAA's most valuable educational and marketing tools with your Banner or Classified ads, articles, photos, events, and "Snapshots".

- A. **Resource Section** – We need articles or blurbs related to the topics below. We are asking our members to help write these sections. Please email al@newaim.com with your articles or intent to compose within the next few days. Please feel free as well to send additional topics you would like to see addressed on the MAA website.
 - 1. What questions should I ask when I visit a farm?
 - 2. How do I know if I can start a farm where I live?
 - 3. LLC? Inc? What options do I have to establish my business?

- B. **Gallery** – Have you made a beautiful shawl and want to show it off? What about a woven alpaca blanket that you want to show the world? Send your photos to our webmaster at al@newaim.com for posting. We are also looking for artwork related to alpacas and photos of alpacas doing great things or just looking plain stunning in a field. NOTE – When submitting you are allowing for exposure to the world. Please add your copyright material to the photo directly or be warned ahead of time, it's free game for downloading.

- C. **Members in the News** – This section will provide brief articles or information on what our members are doing in and out of the alpaca industry. Informative and fun pieces which will tie into the lifestyle aspects of alpaca ownership. Please keep self promotion to a minimum. Please submit to al@newaim.com.

- D. **Snapshot of a Maine Farm** -- this is open to all members of MAA. Tell visitors to the website how you decided to get into your alpaca breeding, fiber farming, or other alpaca-related business. Forms may be downloaded from the Members section and submitted to **Gay deHart**. Each month 2 businesses are chosen by lottery to be featured, and all featured Snapshots are archived.

- E. **Paid Advertising for your farm, products, business, services and stud males....**
 - i. **Classified Advertisements** (Fiber, General Services, Equipment for Sale and Stud Service) – Cost is now \$20/year. Please submit payment to MAA c/o Pam Drew, PO Box 1139, Kennebunkport, ME 04046 and submit the ad to al@newaim.com. Once payment is received, your ad will be posted.

 - ii. **Banner ads**– Front page visibility! 6 per month at the reasonable fee of \$30 per ad. The banner ad will be hot-linked to your farm's website. You may run 2 months in a row. If a space is available the 3rd month, you may be contacted for participation. Banner ad size is 150x50 pixels. Contact **Al Maloney** at al@newaim.com with your questions regarding this great opportunity.

8. Next Membership Meeting

Our next membership meeting will be held on Saturday, January 10, 2009 at the Great Wall Buffet, Augusta, at 11:30 AM.

Guest Speaker: TBA

RSVP: Patricia Houde 207 698-5920 or alpacafields@earthlink.net

The BOD will be meeting on Dec 2nd, so if you have anything you wish to be added to the agenda for the January 10th meeting, please contact Raini Perry, 993-2025 (leave a message) or lcblowers@hotmail.com

The next MAA e-Newsletter will go out in early March. Deadline for submissions of articles or events is Feb 15, 2009. Please send Newsletter ideas, articles, comments, etc. to Pam Harwood at pdh@longwoodsapacas.com.

Thanks for your time and support of MAA!!!