

## Culled Alpaca Sold For Meat

Catherine Simpson has built demand for alpaca meat produced from animals she culled out of her herd. The high-demand animals usually sell at a premium for breeding stock or fleece production. Simpson likes having an outlet for lower quality, fleece-producing animals. "I tasted alpaca meat in Peru and loved it," says Simpson.

In Peru she was told that alpacas with lower quality fleece were harvested for meat. At the time, Simpson was the president of the Canadian Llama and Alpaca Association. She recognized a need for a meat outlet in Canada.

"Too often animals are sold to new entrants to the industry as 'good' animals when they are not," she says. "That is bad for the industry and the buyers."

When Simpson first argued for using culls as meat animals, she got nasty emails. "People who think of them as pets can't wrap their heads around the idea of eating them," she says.

Simpson could and did after taking in a group of rescue alpacas. The underfed and neglected animals regained their health, but were never going to produce quality

fleece. After having the animals butchered, the first cuts were not great. "Prime cuts and the ground alpaca were fine, but everything else was so tough," says Simpson.

Her butcher noted the similarity between extremely lean alpaca and venison. He advised taking prime cuts and grinding the rest.

"We add grated potato to the ground for moisture when we make patties, then grill them," says Simpson. "I think they taste better than beef hamburgers."

Simpson also makes 11 different kinds of sausages from the ground meat, from breakfast sausage to blueberry, spicy and beer sausage. She also makes alpaca jerky.

"I used to make dog food, but the meat is too valuable," says Simpson. "We sell tenderloins for \$30 per lb. and rib eye for \$22 per lb."

The lightweight animals yield approximately 80 lbs. of carcass or 55 lbs. of boned-out meat. One challenge for Simpson was to find a slaughterhouse willing to do the extra work with alpaca. Unlike cattle, the hide has to be cut off, not pulled. Saving the hide is important.



Catherine Simpson in British Columbia has developed a local market for alpaca meat produced from culled animals. She makes 11 kinds of sausages and also sells prime cuts.

"I send the hides to a tannery and have them made into rugs," she explains. "They make fabulous fireplace rugs, and people with arthritis report they are great body temperature regulators as lap robes."

Simpson notes that the hides don't simply add value. They are essential to profits. "We couldn't do it solely on meat," she says. "At first we couldn't make any money. It was a slow learning curve. You have to take out all your costs and still have enough left over to cover the base value of the animal."

While Simpson has developed a local market for alpaca, she admits creating a broader market is not likely to happen. She notes that there are only about 35,000 registered alpaca in Canada and 100,000 in the U.S. It also requires that breeders pass



up the premium that can be had selling cull animals as quality breeding stock or fleece producing animals to unsuspecting buyers.

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## Rare Jericho Goats Originated In Spain

Broken Diamond Livestock is doing its part to preserve the unique Jericho line of Spanish goats that trace their lineage back to the Spanish conquistadors. Today they're most numerous in Texas. Many common lines of the breed originated there under low parasite and low humidity conditions. High humidity and worms can be an issue in other Southern states.

"Jericho goats were developed in this climate and are very parasite resistant," says Courtney Norman, Broken Diamond Livestock. "We have been trying to produce goats that will work throughout the South by crossing different lines."

Courtney and her husband Shan have raised goats their entire lives, but recently added the Jerichos to their goat and cattle operation. They took over developing and refining the line from a woman whose family maintained the Jerichos for generations. They are local to the area, dating back to pre-Civil War times.

"She had been selecting and improving the family goat herd since the 1970's, but was no longer able to keep them," says Courtney. "She sold her herd to us, and we have been working with them since. Our daughter suggested calling them Jerichos for a natural feature in the area they came from called the Jericho Wall."

The Normans showed pictures of the goats to Dr. D. P. Sponenberg, Virginia Tech professor and technical advisor to the Livestock Conservancy. He is an internationally recognized goat geneticist.

"He said ours were a unique line with nothing to compare to in the Spanish goat breeds," recalls Courtney. "He advised us to get our numbers up and continue to select and improve them."

The Normans now have around 30 Jerichos with plans to get them up to 100 head before offering any for sale. She describes the Jerichos as being very meaty goats and deep bodied. Mature nannies run about 130 lbs.

with billys reaching 175 lbs. Colors vary from solid reds to the more common black and brown, often with a badger face.

In addition to being parasite resistant, they are also very hardy. Courtney notes that every nanny bred back has had a kid except one. It is no longer in the herd, having been sold for meat.

"We cull pretty hard for meat, hardiness and parasite resistance," she explains. "We don't sell anything to buyers we wouldn't keep ourselves. If they don't produce, they go to the meat market."

"They provide weed and brush control," says Courtney. "Chinese tallow trees are a huge problem across the region, but our goats have wiped them out in our pastures. They do a good job holding down pigweed as well."

In addition to the Jerichos, the Normans maintain 4 other purebred lines of Spanish goats. They also sell crossbreeds selected for vigor. Prices start at around \$300 for nanny kids and \$250 for billy kids.



Jericho goats are a rare breed that trace their lineage back to the Spanish conquistadors.

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## Dogs Trained To Detect Crop Disease

Teaching dogs to detect clubroot weeds in canola fields was a challenging project for dog trainer Bill Grimmer. At 71, the owner of Grimmers Canine College used the same training techniques he used for detection of other things - explosives, narcotics, mold, pole rot, cadavers, and fire accelerants, for example.

Clubroot is a soil-borne disease that causes galls - or nodules - on canola plant roots resulting in yield losses. It also affects cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, and other high-value crops. They can become infested by equipment traveling between fields. One management tool has been to thoroughly disinfect equipment between fields.

By proving a dog can detect clubroot, Grimmer says there is opportunity for entrepreneurs and industry to offer services to farmers and canola oil companies.

The Shediac, New Brunswick, man began his project last spring at the request of a plant pathologist with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, paid with a Canadian Agricultural Partnership grant.

Grimmer worked with 3 dogs, an

8-month-old Goldendoodle from a shelter, a 2-year-old German Shepherd that had been trained for tracking, and a Labrador he owned that had been originally trained for narcotics.

Using clubroot roots that were shipped to him, Grimmer and trainer Mario Bourque started the training inside and then took the dogs to the field. They were trained to sit, bark and dig whenever they detected clubroot.

"I only reward the dogs for the right target scent and it eventually becomes habitized," Grimmer says. "We completed the training in 3 months."

In October, the trainers flew with the Goldendoodle and German Shepherd to Alberta for trials on 4 fields. They performed the clinical trial demonstration flawlessly.

However, the dogs were distracted the first day in the fields by all the new experiences stressors such as flying, staying at a hotel, gophers, and many people standing around. The dogs settled down the second day and found clubroot and responded as they had been trained.

"Ninety-nine percent of the training work is

developing confidence in the dog," Grimmer says.

The dogs were fitted with GPS collars, and each time they stopped the spot was marked on a map on an iPad.

The dogs also inspected brand new and used equipment and successfully detected areas where clubroot pieces as small as a dime had been placed.

"They found them 100 percent of the time," Grimmer says.

Thoroughly cleaning heavy machinery is a lengthy and expensive process. But even with the cleaning, they still might not find and remove all of the clubroot.

"If they can sweep equipment with a dog, that's opened a whole new industry for people to train dogs both for canola and the exploration industry," Grimmer says. "A dog can cover 100 sq. ft. in a minute, so a day's work in a field could cover a lot of territory."

That is much more efficient than sending workers out in the field looking for damaged plants and cleaning equipment every time between fields.

Grimmer says he can train people who



Bill Grimmer uses trained dogs to detect clubroot weeds in canola fields. Dogs are fitted with GPS collars so that each time they stop, the spot is marked on a digital map.

want to work with their own dogs or for people who want to start a clubroot detection business.

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