

Breed Standards: Frequently Asked Questions

1) **Why is crossbreeding of Suri alpacas addressed in the standard?**

This issue is addressed primarily as a means of discouraging the continued use of this as a breeding strategy in the production of Suris **in the future**. There is no intention of disenfranchising in any way those Suris who have a Huacaya somewhere in their pedigree. The vast majority of Suri breeders have been strongly opposed to crossing Suris with Huacayas from the beginning. It is the long term goal of the Suri industry to develop the Suri alpaca into a purebred livestock breed. Developing a breed standard with a statement opposing crossbreeding is consistent with that goal. From its inception the Suri Network has consistently opposed this as a valid breeding strategy. The primary proponents of this method have been the Australians. For reasons of their own, they chose to accelerate the increase in Suri numbers in Australia by crossing the two breeds. It has been practiced to a lesser degree in the U.S. as well. In the U.S. sufficient numbers of Suri alpacas were imported from South America to establish a national herd. Given that there are now 17,000 Suris registered in the U.S. and that 10,000 of these are females, there is absolutely no justification to practice crossbreeding as a method to increase their numbers. It is felt that addressing the issue in the breed standard will significantly discourage this practice **in the future**.

The decision on whether or not to include this in the Suri breed standard was guided by the opinions of Suri breeders in the U.S. In October of 2006 all Suri breeders were sent a questionnaire by the Suri Network regarding this issue and the overwhelming majority of respondents, both Suri Network members and nonmembers alike indicated a desire to see this included in the standard.

2) **How is crossbreeding addressed in the breed Standard?**

In the first section of the breed standard, '*Phenotype of the Suri Alpaca*', the last sentence states the following. '*The Suri alpaca phenotype is produced by the breeding of a Suri alpaca male with a Suri alpaca female.*' Perhaps some further discussion might help in explaining what is meant by this statement. It is very important that breeders fully understand the intent. In its most basic form this means that the standard is met if one breeds two alpacas that look like Suris and are registered with ARI as Suris. Another way of stating this is that both the sire and dam should have a Suri phenotype. There is nothing here that implies that either alpaca needs to be a homozygous Suri as this is based on phenotype not genotype. If it looks like a Suri then it is, by phenotype, a Suri. On the other hand, if one of the alpacas is a Huacaya, looks like a Huacaya and is registered as a Huacaya then that would not produce an alpaca that would meet this criteria. It is also important that we are looking forward with this standard and not on what has been done in the past.

3) **Will a Breed Standard have any impact on registration with ARI?**

It is important to understand very clearly that the presence or absence of a breed standard will have **NO bearing on registration**. This policy has been clearly stated by the ARI. If you breed two registered alpacas to each other and all current requirements are met then you have an alpaca that the ARI will register. There is absolutely no connection between a breed standard and the ARI registration process in any way. Any continuing fear about the ability to register an alpaca that in some way does not meet the breed standard is unfounded. The ARI has clearly established this policy and if anyone has questions about this they are encouraged to contact the ARI directly.

4) Why now?

There comes a time in the development of any livestock industry when developing a breed standard becomes appropriate. It is not so much a question of whether or not a standard will be developed but a question of when it will be done and by whom. Alpaca breed standards have already been developed in countries like Australia and Canada and doing so in the U.S. would seem timely at this point. Developing a breed standard now will help tremendously in achieving recognition as a production livestock breed. In this day and age it will be difficult to attain such recognition in the U.S. livestock industry without a standard that defines our breed. That time has come and if we are not willing to do so as a group then it is quite likely that multiple competing standards will be developed by individuals or small groups who are interested in promoting their personal vision of what defines the ideal Suri alpaca. Multiple standards would send the wrong message as it would indicate lack of direction and purpose. In that scenario the person with the most marketing dollars wins and the industry as a whole loses. Timing is important as the clock never stands still. The sooner we as breeders establish a consensus based standard the better.

5) If Peru and Bolivia don't have an alpaca breed standards why do we need one?

This question has come up on several occasions. It would be a valid concern if Peru were making significant strides in improving the quality of their alpaca fiber. Unfortunately they are not. In fact the quality is progressively declining. This undoubtedly has many causes but in part may be due to the lack of a standard to define what is desirable and what is not. As a consequence breeders have no goals to aspire to and the results are not encouraging. The pastoral nature of their industry and the lack of education by the breeders also make standards a difficult thing to achieve in Peru. We have no such impediment here.

6) Who wrote this breed standard?

This standard was written with input from any and all Suri breeders who wished to have something to say. The Suri Network realized from the beginning that for this process to be effective that an all inclusive approach was crucial. There were at least three surveys that went out to all Suri breeders, members and non-members alike, regarding breed standards. There were open large group discussions at two Suri Network Symposiums/Type Conferences in 2005 and 2006. At the Suri Symposium in 2005 a rough draft was written with the participation of over 100 Suri breeders. At many of the regional AOBA Affiliate type conferences which were open to any Suri breeders, there were Suri Network representatives facilitating input by interested Suri breeders. There were therefore many opportunities for breeders to participate if they chose to do so. Every attempt was made to make this as open and as inclusive as possible. Recognizing the need to include the opinion of other stakeholders such as fiber processors, designers, other fiber industry experts, veterinarians and judges; there were opportunities for their input as well.

7) How does this relate to AOBA's efforts regarding a breed standard?

In the fall of 2005 the Suri Network and the AOBA boards had a joint conference call regarding this topic. It was agreed on that call that there would be two breed standards, one for Suris and one for Huacayas. It was further agreed that the Suri Network would coordinate the development of the Suri standard. The Suri Network agreed to include all Suri breeders in this process, as we have done, and not limit it to Suri Network members. As a consequence, there has been little or no effort by AOBA to develop a Suri standard independent from what has been done by the Suri Network. At the AOBA national type conference in Reno, NV, the process was limited to work on developing a Huacaya

standard. AOBA recognized that the Suri community had essentially completed their work on the Suri standard.

At present the whole issue regarding standards and especially the Huacaya standard is up in the air with AOBA. From the beginning we have felt very strongly that when it came to voting on a Suri standard that only breeders who own Suris should vote on that standard. Many of you have invested significant time and thought in the process of developing this standard. It is time to move on with this by submitting this to a vote by you, the Suri breeders of the U.S. We do not know for sure if acceptance of this standard by this vote will eventually lead to its becoming the AOBA Suri Breed Standard or not. We only know that passage would make it the Suri Network Suri Alpaca Breed Standard. Once that is accomplished the next step would involve further negotiation with AOBA. We cannot read what the crystal ball has to say regarding that next step. Only time will tell us the answer.

8) This has been a two year process. What has happened during that time leading up to this vote?

- Fall 2004, Suri Network survey indicated a majority of members wanted to pursue development of an independent Suri Breed Standard and that Suri Network was the best organization to pursue this;
- Consultant suggests broad based educational and consensus approach;
- Winter 2005 first meeting of breed standards committee;
- Education on standards using Suri Network News and PurelySuri™ magazine;
- Summer Symposium 2005 1st Suri Breed Standards Type Conference develops rough draft of Suri Network Suri Alpaca Breed Standard;
- Survey of members and non-members on positive and negative traits as well as comments on rough draft;
- Joint conference call of Suri Network board with the AOBA board discussing and reaching agreement on Suri Network role in developing the Suri breed standard;
- Suri Network offers, in agreement with AOBA, to help regional affiliates at their type conferences as a means to include more Suri breeders in developing the Suri standard. Most conferences were attended by a Suri Network representative.
- Suri Network Summer Symposium conducts further education on standards as well as developing a proposal for a 'review and revision' mechanism to direct future changes in the standard once developed;
- Final survey sent to all Suri breeders regarding three topics; prioritization of fiber characteristics, crossbreeding and the proposed 'review and Revision' proposal;
- Vote on acceptance of the standard.

9) Why do we need a breed standard when we have show rules; aren't they the same thing?

In the absence of breed standards the show rules have, by necessity, served as a substitute for standards. This is like putting the cart before the horse as it should be the other way around. One problem with show rules is that they are not developed as a goal to guide an industry or to help determine breeding decisions. Another is that show rules are determined, not by a broad consensus of stake holders, but rather by a small group of appointed individuals who meet behind closed doors to write these rules. Although appropriate for show rules, this simply is not the way to determine something as important as a breed standard. As has been true for the document you are considering now, there should be extensive deliberation by many individuals. Show rules are also subject to the interpretation of an individual judge. Having a breed standard should diminish that problem. Once a breed standard is passed it will be used to provide the basis for which show rules are determined with regards to evaluation of animals and fleece.

10) Will having a breed standard help protect the Livestock designation that alpacas enjoy for purposes of taxation?

It is felt that a breed standard that addresses the Suri alpaca as a production livestock breed might help the industry to maintain this classification.

11) Why should we develop a breed standard?

- a) A breed standard, once widely accepted, can be a strong unifying force within the industry. The breed standard serves as a target or goal to aim at or aspire to.
- b) A breed standard will discourage crossbreeding.
- c) A breed standard having been developed by consensus of all major stake holders will discourage the development of multiple competing standards. Multiple standards would retard progress toward overall national herd improvement by confusing breeders as to which target to shoot for.
- d) A breed standard will serve the new buyer by serving as a yardstick against which to measure potential purchases.
- e) A breed standard can facilitate the development of evaluation tools that established and new breeders alike can use to determine the success of their breeding program. Such evaluations can augment show ring performance as a means of such evaluation.
- f) In the future a breed standard can facilitate the development of data sets that breeders can utilize to track performance thus facilitating selection based on objective performance criteria.
- g) A breed standard will help bring better objectivity to the show ring.

12) What are some things a Breed Standard will NOT do?

- a) A standard will not cause the breeders to dramatically shift breeding practices in favor of inbreeding and line breeding to achieve conformity to the standard and will therefore not cause significant decreases in genetic diversity. Selective breeding of any sort causes some decrease in the frequency of certain genes as we are always trying to improve the qualities of our alpacas by decreasing the bad genes and increasing the good ones.
- b) A breed standard will not cause massive changes in value of individual alpacas. The marketplace already stratifies the value of individual animals based on a presumed set of industry-wide criteria. Because the proposed breed standard was developed with consensus from many breeders it is largely in line with those criteria and therefore a significant shift in those valuations is not anticipated.

Additional sources of information regarding Suri Breed Standards:

- 1) Article, "Breed Standards" *PurelySuri*TM Summer 2005 pp 88-91.
- 2) Article, "The Suri Alpaca: A Unique Breed" *PurelySuri*TM Herdsire magazine, Spring 2006 pp 98-100.
- 3) Article, "A Brief History of Breed Standards in the Alpaca Industry" *Suri Network News*, November 2005.

These are posted on the Suri Network website at www.SuriNetwork.org.