

Reimagining Alpacas

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ABSTRACT

Newly “discovered” to industrialized societies, alpacas have gained popularity as both livestock and pet in the United States over the last quarter century. This American micro-culture is a nexus of many traditional and post-modern activities; hobby farming, eco-ranching, fiber artistry, show animal competitions, organic textile manufacturing, and participating in a specialized knowledge community. This study explores the relationship between the alpaca lifestyle, breeding enthusiasts, and the fiber industry.

Examining a population of Midwest alpaca producers, a qualitative examination of producer motivations as exhibited on alpaca-oriented websites and how these vary across the urban – rural continuum is presented. As a case study of post-modern farming in America, an ongoing reimagination that is guiding this micro-culture and the fiber industry are considered. This thesis is presented by an industry participant and advocate of an alpaca fiber industry. The study is intended to add to the discussion about post-modern agricultural practices in the United States and to literature concerning the animal – human relationship. It concludes that the alpaca industry is trending towards fiber production. Study results indicate that producers of all sorts share common objectives, even if approaching them from differing viewpoints. Lifestyle farmers, breeding enthusiasts and fiber producers will have their roles to play as the alpaca fiber industry develops.