

# The ahs and awe over alpacas

Expiring provision allows half write-off of farm purchases

BY JANE MEGGITT Staff Writer



**PHOTOS BY CHRIS KELLY staff Betsy Belfiore, of Pennsylvania, tries to give an alpaca an apple during the Nov. 1 alpaca sale at the Horse Park of New Jersey in Upper Freehold. Below: Alpacas await potential buyers at the sale.**

When Doug Kittrell and his family moved to New Jersey from Virginia two and a half years ago, they bought a farm in Jobstown, where they could care for alpacas.

The alpaca is a domesticated species of South American camelid that resembles a small llama. The animals come in over 20 different colors, and almost every shade was represented at the Nov. 1 Eastern Alliance Alpaca Sale in the Horse Park of New Jersey.

Kittrell's alpacas at the sale were priced between \$5,000 and \$24,000. He said the average sale features animals between \$2,500 and \$25,000, with females selling for between \$10,000 and \$15,000. While males fetch lower prices, breeding studs, such as Kittrell's FD Panther and Royal Command, garner \$2,500 in stud fees.

When asked about how he became an alpaca farmer, Kittrell said that several years ago, a plumber giving him a work bid had the image of an alpaca on the cover sheet. Kittrell asked the plumber about alpacas, and a week later saw a TV commercial about the animals. He did research and visited farms before deciding to take the plunge into alpaca farming. Kittrell said he was impressed to discover that many successful business people, including CEOs and other executive level professionals are alpaca farmers.

Neither he nor his wife had previous livestock experience. His wife, Bonnie Belfiore, was a teacher but now cares for 23 alpacas full time on the family's Double 8 Ranch.

Kittrell said the average alpaca produces 5 pounds of blanket fleece annually, which sells for about \$3 an ounce. The value of the fleece increases with smaller microns, he said. Vicunas, a cousin of the alpaca that cannot be exported from South America, have fleece worth approximately \$200 an ounce, at 12 microns, he said. Alpacas can produce fleece for up to 20 years, according to Kittrell.



Jackie Armiger and her husband Walter Kozachek, who own Windy Farm Alpacas in Chesterfield, have raised alpacas since 1999, when they bought an old farm with a barn on 5 acres.

"You can raise alpacas on 5 acres," she said, adding that they now have more than 20 on their property.

Windy Farm Alpacas had animals at the sale ranging in price from \$4,000 to

\$15,000, and alpacas at stud with fees from \$1,800 to \$2,250.

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A longtime craftswoman, Armiger also had many homemade alpaca fleece items for sale, including socks, sweaters, hats, gloves, scarves and handbags. Each year, the couple hires shearers to shear their flock, which generally costs about \$35 a head, she said. With help holding the animals, the shearers can remove the fleece from each alpaca in about seven minutes, according to Armiger.

Arminger advised anyone thinking about getting in the alpaca business to do their homework.

"Learn to evaluate their conformation and their fleece," she said.

Potential alpaca farmers need to determine financing and to learn about the tax advantages of raising this type of livestock, according to Armiger.

Lori Oraschin, an accountant from Quakertown, Pa., gave a seminar on tax issues related to alpaca farming at the sale. She said that under the economic stimulus tax provisions passed by Congress this spring, farmers can write off up to 50 percent of the cost of buying alpacas, equipment, barns and fencing, but the provision expires Jan. 1.