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# A Bright future for Suri fiber

Suri Network Product Development Committee

**S**uri fiber has long been considered a cherished fiber — lustrous, fluid, warm, and soft. At the same time, its rarity has often caused it to take a backseat to more commonly known specialty fibers such as merino, cashmere, huacaya alpaca, and mohair. At present, Suri production is limited to a small segment of the alpaca world. In Peru, which has the largest alpaca population, Suri fiber represents less than 10% of the total fiber output of the country. The overwhelming percentage of Suri yarn produced in Peru is woven into a brushed fabric that is used for outerwear.

However, there exists a small but passionate group of Suri raisers around the world who are focused on expanding what are, at the present time, the limited applications and understanding of this unique fiber. For Suri breeders in the United States, this spells opportunity! The U.S. is well positioned to take a leading role in the development and promotion of this wonderful fiber, and to bring it to the forefront of the textile world.

We are a dedicated group of breeders who want to see the Suri fiber industry succeed. There is a resurgence of interest in natural fibers, and there are seg-

ments of the textile industry where Suri is only now starting to be considered. U.S. Suri growers have the ability to be first to market in many of those segments.

The Suri Network (SN) has taken a leadership role to seize upon this opportunity by providing educational seminars and articles on fiber, actively promoting the fiber on behalf of its members, and creating demand for Suri fiber where it did not exist before.

Take a look at the various programs we are currently offering our members:

## Education

If you are new to this breed, we encourage you to attend our basic seminar, which takes people through the three phases of turning raw fiber into yarn. The seminar is held at various dates and times throughout the country. It offers lots of hands-on experience where attendees learn to evaluate raw fleeces for positive and nega-

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[www.surinetwork.org](http://www.surinetwork.org)

tive traits, learn the value of histograms, follow the fiber through processing, and examine the fiber in its finished state to understand how all the positive and negative traits of the raw fleece impact the end product.

If you currently own Suris and would like to host a seminar on your farm, consider purchasing one of our “turnkey” seminars through the SN. We’ll provide the syllabus, the instructor, and all samples and handouts. You just need to provide the location and the attendees.

## Fiber Festivals

Prior to 2008, there were a number of misconceptions about Suri that circulated within the fiber arts community; so the SN decided to start a formal marketing campaign to let people know all the positive attributes of Suri. Since that time, we have set up educational booths at large fiber festivals around the country. The booth has a “drop in and spin” theme, with spinning mentors on hand to show newcomers how to work with Suri. There are finished garments on hand to show people the best applications of Suri and give them ideas for working with the fiber. Raw fleece and roving are on hand for people to feel, and SN members are at the booth to answer any questions. Additionally, in order to make the connections between our visitors and our members, the booth provides a directory of farms that are interested in selling fleece, roving, yarn, and other fiber products.

These efforts have resulted in growing and enthusiastic interest in Suri in the fiber arts community. Artisans are starting to look at Suri in a whole new light, and they like what they see (and feel)! So, stop by one of our booths, put your hands on this exquisite fiber, sit down and spin with one of our spinning mentors, or just look around at the display of finished products. You’ll see what all the excitement is about.

## Product Development

Product support is a key component of understanding the best applications of a fiber and of promoting that fiber in the best possible way. To that end, the SN is proud to offer the first commercially available Suri knitting patterns for

sale at the retail and wholesale level. These patterns serve and educate Suri owners, knitters, and processors alike, and are the start of our efforts to help people to fully understand the beauty of this fiber.

Because Peru has focused on Suri as a woven fabric, the knitting applications have been largely overlooked. No one had ever developed knitting patterns for Suri in the commercial market. We knew that developing such patterns would open doors for our fiber on several levels:

- With patterns and photos, knitters can begin to understand the best uses of this fiber. There is no doubt about it: Suri is a specialty fiber. When it is used properly, knitters love it.
- Because patterns include information about the grades of fiber to use, fiber producers can begin to steer their breeding programs towards the demands of the fiber market.
- Owners of farm stores are now able to have better information to make smart, cost effective decisions about processing their fiber. Instead of making yarn and then hoping a consumer would figure out what to do with the yarn, they can now match patterns with skeins, “kit” their yarn and patterns together, and give their customers real direction.

We launched the first set of patterns in August of 2009, and to date, we have sold over 1400.

## Fiber Arts Publications

If you enjoy fiber arts, then pick up a copy of magazines such as *Spin-Off*, *Handwoven*, or *Knits Magazine* and you may see an article about Suri. We periodically run magazine articles to educate fiber folks about the applications of this fiber and to ensure they have a positive experience when working with Suri.

Additionally, we have recently developed an introductory brochure about Suri fiber that is available to all SN members for redistribution to prospective buyers, festival-goers, and anyone else you think might have an interest.

## Marketing Fiber or Fiber Markets

Today, there are several ways to market your fiber. If you enjoy retailing, you can have the yarn processed and sell it yourself out of a farm store or work with a local retailer to sell it in your community. If you love



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the animals but don't want to do anything with the fiber, consider joining a co-op or fiber pool. These offer an outlet for your fiber and generally pay you in goods or cash. Lastly, if you want to get more feedback about your fiber, consider selling it directly to someone who processes and sells Suri. These individuals can analyze your clip and give you tips and suggestions for improving your overall breeding program. Additionally, the SN recognizes the great potential for Suri fiber and is exploring options for pooling the national clip.

## Conclusion

The SN has its act together on a multitude of initiatives. When it comes to fiber, it has developed a solid promotional plan for taking Suri to the commercial market and the membership is supporting this effort all the way. Additionally, the opportunities for the U.S. to be "first to market" with this fiber in so many

areas just makes the buzz about Suri all the more understandable. So drop by a local Suri farm and see what the excitement is all about. ●

### AUTHORS

#### The Suri Network Product Development Committee

(SNPDC) was established in 2006 to inform Suri Network members and the general public about the characteristics and uses of Suri fleece, to create U.S. markets for Suri fiber, and to develop new products for the promotion of this unique luxury fiber in the world market. Today, the committee consists of seven members from around the country:

**Liz Vahlkamp**, Committee Chair, Salt River Alpacas, Paris, Missouri; **Holli Cox**, Hidden Hilltop Alpaca Ranch, Lexington, Ohio; **Lynn Deichman**, GlimmerGlass Alpacas, Fly Creek, New York; **Christine Perala Gardiner**, Suri Futures, Cave Junction, Oregon; **Kathy Gilliland**, Diamond Valley Alpaca Ranch, Livermore, Colorado; **Donna Rudd**, Suri Textiles, Alberta, Canada; **Sue Simonton**, Little Gidding Farm Suris, Lester Prairie, Minnesota