

South American Alpacas - Now Made in Maine Record Amount of Fleece Shorn this Spring

After shearing their herds this May, Maine's alpaca farmers came to this year's Maine Fiber Frolic in record numbers. And they came with reports of a banner year for the record amount of fleece produced in the State by their alpacas. Production is estimated at about 2,500 lbs, worth almost \$100,000. Thirty years ago, there wasn't a single alpaca in Maine. The animals started to be imported into the United State in the 1980's. The exceptionally fine alpaca fleeces and the yarns they are spun into, are now made in Maine as well as in Peru, Chili and Bolivia.

Held at the Winsor Fairgrounds on June 12 & 13, the annual festival attracts weavers, spinners and knitters looking for specialty fiber as well as the traditional sheep's wool. Terry Beal is the Administrative Chairperson for the festival, which was started by the Maine Llama Association. "This is *the premier* fiber event (in Maine) and it happened naturally, starting off as something we used to run called Maine Llama Day. The festival was expanded to include other fiber-producing animals such as cashmere goats, angora rabbits and alpacas (which are related to llamas in the camelid family). Beal said he would be willing to "bet good money on it", when asked if he thought this was a record production year for the 500 alpacas now estimated to make up Maine's herd. "We have more alpaca farms here (at the festival) this year, that's for sure. As exhibitors there were just six to eight last year, but this year we must of had ten to twelve --I would say off the top of my head". The growth of Maine's herd has resulted in an increase of fiber processing mills, which clean, card and spin the fleece into yarn. Beal commented, "Certainly the number of fiber processors is in a growth stage. We had zero as exhibitors, five years ago (when the festival started)... then we had one or two... and now we have half a dozen. And they wouldn't be here, if there wasn't more (specialty) fiber to process.

Maine Fiber Frolic