

# “Integrating Science with the Art of Breeding”

- more than just a tag line.



By Rob and Joanna Stephens



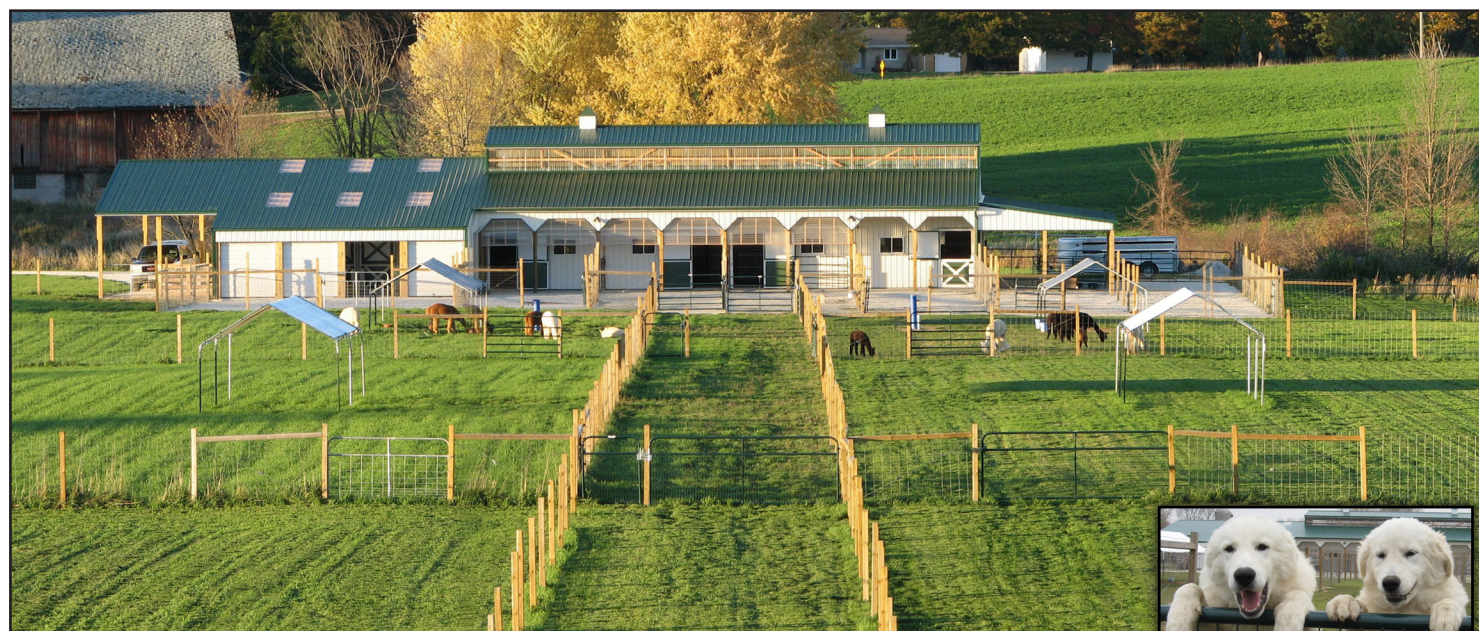
There are as many reasons to become involved in the alpaca industry as there are alpaca breeders. For us, it started with the blending of our two families through marriage. Our goal was to move to a place where we had acreage and could give our children, who are animal lovers, something more than the usual household pet. Our plan also provided the opportunity to work together as a family in a healthy outdoor environment. This is how RobAsia Alpacas was born.

It all started six years ago with the purchase of five acres and four alpacas. As luck would have it, a friend of ours told us about 75 acres that were available. We purchased the property, redesigned the house and decided to build barns in keeping with the unique needs of alpacas. We knew that this would be more than a hobby for us. What we didn't realize at the time was that it would turn into a passion which has evolved into a full time endeavor with more than 65 Huacaya alpacas in our herd.

We knew that passion alone would not be enough to build a top quality herd and to be able to mentor others into the industry with knowledge and guidance. Knowing that succeeding in this business involved more than the purchase of alpacas, we became totally absorbed in the study of alpaca husbandry and genetics. We travelled extensively to alpaca farms throughout the United States and even Peru, gained knowledge from experienced alpaca breeders and established close working relationships with the most experienced alpaca veterinarians in the country. Believing that knowledge is the key to success, we attended countless seminars, courses and workshops. We became involved with showing alpacas, and our love not only for the alpacas, but for the industry grew. As our knowledge grew exponentially, we became aware that as with any relatively young industry, there is no proven way to succeed. With this in mind, we were convinced that we had to develop a model that would succeed, not only for ourselves but for our future clients.

The alpaca business is the unique combination of business knowledge and medical/husbandry expertise. We are blessed that our backgrounds gave us an advantage in establishing our alpaca farm. Joanna, a physician specializing in internal medicine, brought her experience in “evidence based science” to our farm. To gain expertise in the herd management of alpacas, Joanna took a year off from her medical practice to fully immerse herself in the herd health and husbandry practices of the alpaca business. During this time Joanna became further convinced that, “If there isn't good scientific evidence of something working in a positive way, you simply do not do it.” This concept of “evidence based science” has been the cornerstone of our alpaca breeding program, using tools such as EPD's, histograms and skin biopsies to advance our alpaca herd to new levels of excellence. In essence, the choice of our tag line “Integrating Science with the Art of Breeding” was easy because it is what we do!

While science and husbandry are a very important part of succeeding in the alpaca industry, it needs to be complemented by a savvy knowledge of business. This is where Rob's background comes into play. With a background in manufacturing, Rob successfully and



profitably ran a family business for over 30 years. This experience has been vital in ensuring the financial success of RobAsia Alpacas. Having sold the family business, Rob now dedicates all of his time to the management of RobAsia Alpacas.

Patiently and judiciously, using our science-based knowledge, we have developed a premier seed stock herd producing exquisitely conformed alpacas with superior fleece characteristics displaying lasting fineness, which we believe will be the cornerstone of a successful North American fiber industry. We realize that a superior alpaca can only be enhanced with superior behavior. One of the main attractions to our clients is that our alpacas are so friendly and well-behaved. We can credit our herd's excellent manners to Marty McGee's Camelid Dynamics. To be able to sell an alpaca that is well-behaved and approachable is very gratifying to us and to our clients. Our belief in the Camelid Dynamics System has incited us to become practitioners so that we can impart the knowledge of this valuable system to others, thereby helping them to succeed.

Looking back on the last 6 years, we appreciate what we have accomplished and look at the years ahead and all that we still want to achieve. One of the most important elements of our current business is the mentoring of new breeders and assisting established breeders with ways to improve their alpaca herds. It is our belief that the success of this industry lies with the success of future generations of breeders. This is why we stress the value of mentoring as such an important aspect of the alpaca industry. Our approach is to be completely honest and accurate with any information that we impart. If our clients are not educated in the science, then we make it our mission to educate them. This sets us apart when our clients start to ask questions within the industry and then begin to understand the value of a relationship with RobAsia Alpacas. Working together we can achieve not only benefits for our individual herds, but benefits for the future of quality alpacas whose superior genetics and fleece characteristics can enhance not only the breeding side of the business but also the fiber industry which, in our opinion, is critical to the

future of the North American Alpaca Industry as a whole.

An important tool that we use which we highly recommend to new breeders and existing breeders is the collection of objective data. This can be achieved through information garnered from skin biopsies, histograms and developing EPD's. These tools provide invaluable information about genetic potential. We have found histograms useful in tracking improvements across our herd year after year. We post historical histograms on all of our alpacas, not just from the first shearing. We want to know what the alpaca is doing over time. This could be critical in future breeding decisions. The use of OFDA200 has given us more information about trends across our herd. We are currently using EPD's as a window for additional information. It is exciting to see similarities across genetic lines from the information provided by histograms, biopsies and EPD's. All of this information is paramount in determining the fair and objective value of our alpacas and their genetic potential. While winning in the show ring is a great honor and a wonderful marketing tool, we believe that the science provides the true basis for evaluating the quality of an alpaca and its genetic potential.

Another important aspect of our business is client service and support. We offer many value added services to our clients including 24-hour phone support, complimentary breeding with each alpaca purchased, a superb selection of herd sires, a generous 3-month cria live birth guarantee, complimentary histogram and skin biopsy with purchased alpacas, expert advice on herd health and herd management, and most importantly, ongoing support long after the sale is done. Our client's success is as important as our own success.

We sincerely hope that this article has peaked your interest in the value of science in the breeding of alpacas and would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

**About RobAsia Alpacas:** Joanna and Rob Stephens live in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, the home of 65 huacaya alpacas. They are full-time alpaca breeders dedicated to continually improving their herd and the quality of their fiber production through the use of science and objective data. For more information about RobAsia Alpacas, please contact Rob and Joanna at:

**rob@robasia-alpacas.com • www.robasiaalpacas.com**

**920-775-9439 or 920-901-5901**

Paid Advertisement



*Integrating science with the art of breeding.*