

ALPACA IS LIFE..., LET'S DEFEND IT

Recently, as part of an onerous and malicious campaign by an NGO, a public questioning about alpaca shearing practices, with the clear objective of promoting the non-consumption of alpaca products globally.

The result is that our entire industry has been questioned, and it is our concern to say something about it.

The NGO's complaint.

A company that belongs to our association has received a severe questioning from the NGO denominated the international organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals - PETA.

Through a wide dissemination of shocking images of alpacas being sheared revealing animal abuse, the NGO denounces to the world that **behind each alpaca garment there is unacceptable torture and that the consumer should consider never buying one again.**

Our task is to contribute to a better understanding of the context of this imputation, which affects not only a company or a guild, **also the very sustainability of alpaca, as a species, and the subsistence of countless Andean communities.** We believe that is the way we could act on facts and not by perceptions.

The Alpaca.

It is one of the South American camels that inhabits the Andean highlands. A challenging environment above 4,000 meters of altitude, with natural pastures, extreme climate and where rural populations that remain in very limited conditions. Alpacas, together with llamas (both domestic species), as well as vicuñas and guanacos (wild species) evolved to inhabit the adverse ecosystem with unique adaptation attributes, among them, their fiber.

Vicuña and alpaca fibers are some of the most precious in the world and have been used by the Andean people since immemorial times.

Evolution.

Scientific studies (Wheeler 1984, Wing 1986) indicate that alpacas and llamas would have already been domesticated between 6,000 and 5,500 years ago, forming a central part of the development of rich pre-Hispanic cultures.

Its evolution of thousands of years, as well as the good management of herds by the Andean ancestral settlers, made these species suppliers of abundant thin and long fiber, the main source of fiber for the development of sophisticated textiles that even today are admired.

This ancient evolution made these species, like sheep, not to **have a natural molt of hair, thus requiring the annual process of shearing, which is the cut of its hair or fleece, without harming the animal.**

The shearing of Alpacas.

The shearing of haired animals is almost identical in procedures: the animal is taken from the shed, held, the fleece is cut and then returned to the shed. The sheep - which is very docile - is held between the legs by the shearing operator. The shearing of Alpacas is practically the same, with the only difference that, being a larger animal, with longer legs and less docile than sheep, it is retained not with the legs but with small thin ropes. **This way, the process is equally fast (5 minutes once a year) and you avoid hurting the animal.**

This is how we shear in the High Andean countries and the whole world, so it was done by the ancestral and current communities shearers, and this is how it's sheared by those who are part of our association. Such are the manuals, procedures and shearing recommendations of **specialized international bodies such as FAO, the European Community,** and dozens more.

Shearing is also necessary and healthy. An alpaca overloaded with its own hair makes this an environment full of dirt, parasites, and severe diseases for the animal, and even overweight that deforms its own back, threatening the possibility of dying from suffocation.

The Andean world according to the NGO

Today it is estimated that there are 4.4 million alpacas that live mainly in the Andes of Peru, whose breeding in small herds is run by tens of thousands of families, for whom this **activity is the main source of their income and subsistence**. The breeding of alpacas and llamas is also an ancestral heritage of the Andean settler, who regards these animals as a gift from the Pachamama (Mother Earth) and are treated as one more member of **their families**.

The scenario promoted by **this NGO** where the market rejects the consumption of alpaca products would severely hit the already delicate economy of thousands of families of breeders, whom would face greater poverty and be forced to no longer see their herds as a supplier of valuable fiber for almost **15 years**, but as a source of meat **and skin**.

Therefore, the fate of these animals that graze free today through high Andean fields, would be the slaughterhouse at an early age, when their flesh and skin is most appreciated. It would be sadly anecdotal if **this NGO**, which has fought against the use of furs in fashion, results as the main promoter of a new source of soft Alpaca skin for the market.

The scenario if this NGO's campaign succeeds would therefore be for the international market, the destruction of an industry and trade **generating hundreds of thousands of jobs, and poverty and death for the High Andean rural areas**.

Shared Responsibility.

Those of us who raise, care for and develop an alpaca-based industry have a responsibility and know that we are subject to rigorous public scrutiny, which is good and so it should be. Our farms and operating centers have their doors open to customers, visitors, authorities and certifiers. **It is this transparency that ensures animal welfare and product reliability.**

Going on the hunt for the worst possible image, surreptitiously recording it with a hidden camera, skillfully editing it with sequences, sounds and texts that frame components of torture, and that are massively disseminated on social media, make it clear that the **real intentions of this NGO**, are not to **improve the shearing techniques**, if not they are expressly to completely paralyzed an industry and activity with a high ethnic, social and cultural content.

So, the fate of Alpaca teeters between sustainable use of its fiber or a substitute for beef and pork.

We believe that **the NGO and those who finance it also share a responsibility that** we are not sure they have it clear. In any case, it must not be fear that evades us from it.

We therefore **promote the consumption of alpaca products**, let's defend life.