

I Believe in Alpacas

By John Andresen

I saw my first alpacas in 1997 and I had the same reaction that most people do: I was fascinated by them. But then I got to know their potential and how they are easy to care for and how incredible their fiber is. Unfortunately, still only a small percentage of Americans know what an alpaca is and much fewer know how warm and soft their fiber is.

I believe in alpacas. In many ways, the alpaca industry started in the eighties, and when I found that out, I was excited by the historical significance of alpacas. They are one of the few modern ranching industries and I am a part of it! That's exciting to me. We, in the alpaca industry, are making history.

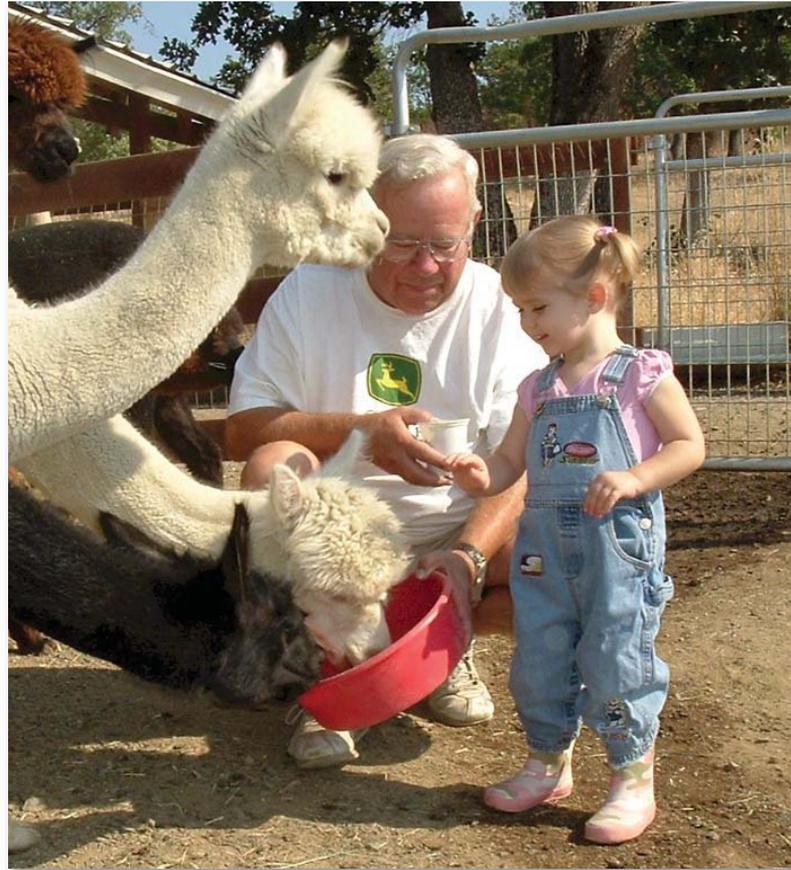
I believe in alpacas. When the economy was strong and the alpaca industry was booming, it was easy to just list your alpacas on a marketplace website and get traffic. But for many years the industry has been failing and most alpaca ranchers keep doing the same things, or less! Alpaca ranchers selling to alpaca ranchers works when there are more buyers than sellers, but now that almost everyone is selling or trying to get out of the industry, it does not work.

I believe in alpacas. If the average alpaca rancher was focused on marketing to non-alpaca ranches the animals would start becoming a standard option found on the average ranch, right next to the cows, horses, and goats; alpacas would increase in value; and the alpaca industry would bounce back.

I believe in baby alpacas. There is no greater sales tool that a ranch can have than crias. Have a few crias in the field and invite families to the ranch and every child will be begging for a baby alpaca. But before you have babies you need to breed and before you can do that you have to be able to afford to feed the animals that you have. Giving them away helps relieve the financial pain, but selling them is the best solution.

I believe in alpaca ranchers. I believe that most alpaca ranchers try to get the word out and market their animals but they have lost heart. I believe that most of you feel that you need to have your animals on alpaca websites and you hand out cards and try to talk about alpacas, but you have lost faith. But I also believe that is not good enough. I believe that we all need to look to new ways to get the word out beyond the alpaca industry where possible. I believe websites that list alpacas in addition to other types of animals are vital to the future of this industry.

I believe that ranches that show up with their animals at Saturday markets and local events, invite tour groups to their ranch, and host farm days, perform a vital service not just for themselves, but for the whole industry. Ranches that volunteer for shows and encourage the public to attend do much more



Norm Andresen and Granddaughter Zoe with Alpacas

than provide an opportunity to receive ribbons.

I believe in alpacas and the ability for us all to stand up with new energy to turn this floundering industry around; to remake it and restart it. I believe that from these ashes, like a phoenix, we can rise up and make alpacas the livestock of the future and not just a historical footnote.

I believe in alpacas. I believe that we should all be mad at doubters that called alpacas an economic bubble that was doomed to fail or just another exotic pet fad. We should be mad and prove them wrong. Don't wait for the economy to pick up. Don't wait for the animal prices to increase. Sit down today and say "what can we do to get the word out?" Find cheap or free options if need be: Go to the bank with an alpaca, enter a parade, invite schools, or take the alpacas to the schools, etc. And spend your marketing money where it counts. Pay to have your animals seen by other types of ranchers, not just alpaca owners.

I believe in alpacas and in this industry and I believe that it will take work and creative thinking, but we can bring this industry back and succeed!

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About the Author

In 2001 John created *The ANDRESENGROUP* in response to the need for quality websites that are marketing-driven, easy-to-maintain, and customized to each customer's needs. Prior to starting *The ANDRESENGROUP* John had 5 years Project Management experience at Intel and Portland General Electric, and over 4 years Software Development experience as a private contractor. In his spare time John cooks, paints, and writes fiction.