



SHARE SCHEMES: For yarns and woven goods

Background

The Natural Fibre Company provides share schemes to help smaller producers to get their fibre processed, but also to provide more variety of product for both producers and Blacker Designs.

We started on the same basis as used when the business was in Wales, but found it very complex. We reviewed this and set up a new system during 2008 and have now, with the benefit of experience, made some more changes, to improve things further.

Pro's and con's of share schemes

For both yarns and textiles there are many benefits:

- For yarns, customers with a variety of coloured fibres can join others and so gain access to a full range without having to submit orders for 20 kg of each colour. This is particularly useful for those with Jacob and Shetland flocks and for alpaca. It also means that you can have a range of different yarn specifications, such as 4-ply, Double Knitting and Aran.
- For textiles, customers can reach the minimum yarn requirements of small commercial weavers, and also add more colours. Also they do not have to take the risk of purchasing a large amount of cloth to sell on and can each take a share of all types of finished goods, whether scarves, throws or lengths of fabric.
- For all products, there is the benefit of getting variety, colour, etc. which is not possible from small batches. When we add fibre from our own stocks this will also help ensure that the resulting quality is good, as we only buy the highest quality of fibre we can find.
- The addition of our dye-plant and the support of our weavers in design mean that even for a single breed woven textile, considerable variety can be achieved.

There are some drawbacks:

- customers can no longer claim the result is from their flock alone, although it will be from the specified breed
- in order to put together a batch suitable for processing, all of the incoming fibre of each breed is pooled, losing the identity of the individual contributors, and it is possible that none of your fibre will be in a specific batch
- mixing the fibres makes a product at the average of the quality available, which may disappoint some customers
- limiting a weaving scheme to a single breed limits the potential designs but too broad a blend loses the breed identity. However, we can often blend with some mohair to achieve a bit of variety and of course we now also dye



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- the administration of a multitude of small orders and quantities is complex and time consuming, particularly at busy times of the year. So customers may not know for some time what has happened to their fibre
- Some customers send their lower quality fibre for the share scheme and get their best quality processed for themselves, which reduces the overall quality of the share scheme pool.

2008 proposals for managing share schemes

As a result of the new review:

- All share scheme suppliers will get access to a graduated discount scheme to buy Blacker Designs products: 15% on 5kg, 20% on 10kg, 25% on 15kg and 30% on 20kg of quality fibre submitted
- Fibre sent in for share schemes will be processed regularly throughout the year, rather than having set closing dates
- Everyone sending fibre will be required to complete a supplier compliance statement
- The minimum quantity accepted for all share schemes is 5 kg. There is no maximum as large producers may also wish to use the share scheme approach for the benefits described overleaf
- Share scheme contributors should send weights less than 20kg by post but those sending larger amounts may continue to use our wool sacks and carriers
- We will monitor the quality of fleece submitted to aim to produce the highest quality goods and will use lower qualities only for appropriate end products
- Some incoming fibre may be rejected to maintain quality and remove poor fleeces, contamination, etc. If this is a significant proportion of fleece supplied, we will discuss this with the supplier and agree a reduced discount, taking account of disposal costs
- We will maintain the product range by adding from our own stocks to ensure sufficient yarn can be made to provide a good range of yarns and textiles
- This means that customers will not have to wait as long to get products
- We are also happy to buy in good quality fleece to maintain the stocks in the pool
- For more details on yarns and fabrics please see overleaf.

PLEASE CONTACT US TO DISCUSS JOINING SHARE SCHEMES OR FOR AN ORDER FORM APPLICATION FORM AND FURTHER INFORMATION ON PRICES, TIMING, ETC.



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Yarn share schemes

- For knitting yarn share schemes, we can now run a continuous pool for all breeds for which we make Blacker Designs yarns. We are happy to look at further breeds and blends and look forward to suggestions.
- We are also interested in suggestions on yarn specifications, such as marls, sock or lace weights and will shortly introduce some bought-in samples for market trial.
- We will offer a small range of organic natural and dyed yarns from autumn, 2009. These cannot be share scheme yarns, but share scheme suppliers may also get trade discounts to buy them.
- We will maintain a basic stock of main breed yarns and colours in DK, plus some in 4-ply, light aran and aran (as appropriate to the fibre) from which yarn share scheme members can order. This will be normally available as balls with ballbands.
- We are able to supply oiled on cone or washed on cone or hanks by arrangement, but this may require waiting until we next make a particular yarn to replenish stocks
- We can supply oiled single weaving yarn and plied, washed rug yarn on cone but again this may require waiting until some is made
- In addition, we can work with breed societies to produce ranges of “elite” yarns and blends, using the best quality fibre to attract the highest value added and then will also work jointly with the societies on marketing patterns, named designer textiles, etc.

The benefits are:

- individuals can still have customised ball bands, for an additional charge
- yarns will be breed specific and can possibly be regional if demand permits
- the range of yarns will be increased and customers will have greater variety
- stocks and batch numbers will be maintained, allowing customers to “top-up” for matching with the same batch until stocks run out
- standardising the yarns will enable more suitable knitting patterns to be commissioned, which will help with marketing
- elite yarns will enable producers to command higher prices, and possibly to blend with silk, etc.
- the cost of loss of identity in the pool is compensated for by lower processing prices and resulting lower cost to the producer.



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Woven share schemes

- We will continue to make a range of scarves, throws and blankets in Shetland, Jacob, Jacob/mohair and alpaca. There are also throws in various other British breeds and a varying range will be maintained. Popular designs will be kept for the longer term, and others will be more varied. All will be marketed by Blacker Designs, which will help promote them.
- We can also undertake joint ventures with small groups of breeders or breed societies to share a run of throws or scarves. In this case, if you commit to buy around half of the output, we will put in half of the fibre and make all the arrangements and market our half via Blacker Designs. This gives you less risk and Blacker Designs a wider product range. We have now done this with several groups but it can take time, so please bear this in mind!
- We can make lengths of cloth suitable for suiting or upholstery. These can be on the same basis as working with a small group, so Blacker Designs will take on half the risk and market half the output.
- We have commissioned fabric designs and have added these to the Blacker Designs range of throws. This has improved the quality and interest of the products and made them more marketable.
- We will add socks and floor rugs when practical. Cushions are already available, and we plan some designs using a small amount of dyed yarn, for baby blankets, etc.

The benefits are:

- textiles will be available all the year round rather than only for limited periods
- using designers improves quality and marketability
- fabrics will normally be breed specific and can possibly be regional if demand permits
- the range of fabrics will be increased and customers will have greater variety
- small group partnerships will know whose fibre has been used, enabling marketing as regional, local, etc.
- the cost of loss of identity in the pool is compensated for by lower processing prices and resulting lower cost to the producer
- stocks of classic standard goods will always be available plus a variety of annual and seasonal designs.