



TOWN END YARNS

A Natural Fibre Company case study



Retirement triggers expansion from alpaca to all knitting yarns

KIM KEARNEY lives and works from a small farm in the Lake District's Winster valley outside Kendal.

She moved here with her husband Brian from Norfolk over ten years ago, keen to do something different - and started breeding alpacas. Over the years they built up a herd of over 100 top quality alpacas.

'We retired from breeding last year and let out our land to our neighbour, but we still have a small herd of alpacas with an agent in Norway' she says.

'I learnt a lot about alpaca fibre when we were breeders as we were always looking for ways to improve the quality of the herd.'

Although her main interest has always been knitting, she also learnt to spin and weave.

'The other thing about me is that I'm a bit obsessive about softness as I find lots of wools very itchy. This is one of the reasons we went for alpacas.

'So, although Brian has retired, I decided to continue producing yarns, but to focus on knitting wool.'

'I now buy my alpaca fleece from other UK breeders. It can be difficult to get hold of enough really good quality fleeces as only the finest goes into my range of pure alpaca yarns.

'The rest is blended with other fibres. Another challenge is that the Natural Fibre Company requires full details of any treatments used on the animals, which means I have to know where my fleeces have come from and get the breeder to tell me what they have used on their herd.

'I spend a fair proportion of my time sourcing, collecting and sorting fleeces. As well as



alpaca, I buy Blue-faced Leicester wool from farmers in Cumbria and Yorkshire.

'White and coloured Shetland wool comes from a farm in Lancashire. I could just buy the prepared tops and have them spun for me, but this way, I'm supporting local farmers by paying them a reasonable amount for their fleece.

'Also, careful sorting means I control the quality of the fibres that go into my yarns. NFC (www.thenaturalfibre.co.uk) spins my pure, natural alpaca yarns and my range of alpaca with Shetland DK and Aran weight yarns along with a very fine alpaca with wool single yarn to be knitted into socks.

'It was always considered heretical in the alpaca world to dye or to blend the fibre. Now, I feel a lot freer to use colour and different fibres to produce the best yarns I can.'



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