



# ALPACA YACA

## SOUTHERN NSW REGION NEWSLETTER

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*The rain threatens in Braidwood but stays away*

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# President's Report

**Three years ago, just after I was elected as Vice-President of the Southern NSW Region, Kerry Dwyer turned to me and said "I have to leave early, will you chair the rest of the meeting?" And he never came back!**

That started my three year career as President of the region – what an interesting, challenging and rewarding time it has been.

I have spent a few hours flicking through copies of Alpaca Yaca for the past three years and it makes for an interesting trip down memory lane. The depth and variety of information that has been published make me realise what a worthwhile journal this is. We must make the effort to contribute and keep this record of our region thriving.

Some of the significant developments over this time have been:

- The birth and growth of the Totally Alpaca Field Day. A vital marketing tool for the region. I believe we can look forward to further development of this premium event making it one of the important dates in the alpaca calendar.
- The transition of the Royal Canberra Show to a short fleece show. This has been a breakthrough in encouraging appropriate shearing practice whilst allowing animals to be shown at a difficult time of the year. This show has pioneered the short fleece format that is now adopted by many shows in the hot months.
- Two National Shows have been held in Canberra, with a third in the preparation stage now. As well as demonstrating the ability of our region to organise and host this significant event, it has also allowed Southern NSW breeders to showcase their wares and prove that our region is prime alpaca breeding country.
- Murrumbateman field days has grown year upon year, enthusiastically supported by a local group of members who are keen to show the public and other farmers that alpacas are a viable option.

During my term as President I have accumulated other jobs along the way and today I have to come to grips with responsibilities involved in

- being a director of the Co-op as we wind that organisation down whilst preserving the maximum value for our shareholders
- serving on the board of Australian Alpaca Fleece Ltd as it ramps up to take over the responsibility for collection and marketing of alpaca fleece
- convening the second successive National Show and Sale in Canberra, with the knowledge that our region hosted a spectacularly successful event last year and we now have an extremely high standard to maintain

Thus it becomes apparent that it is time for me to stand aside from my regional duties and let fresh and uncluttered hands take control. I am grateful for the friendship, advice and assistance that has been afforded me by so many members during my term as President. We have been fortunate to have had a good sized committee during the past year which has helped spread the load for the numerous events on our plate and I would like to thank all the committee members for their time, effort and patience. In particular I would like to note my gratitude to Mark Garner, who has been a tower of strength as Vice-President during this past 12 months when I have been, necessarily, distracted by Co-op and AAFL matters. Also, thank you and well done to those members who are able to put the time and effort into attending regional meetings, thus providing important input to the committee on the desired direction of our regional activities.

*Paul Haslin*

## *Needing a Vet who knows Alpaca ?*

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Medicine – Reproduction - Surgery – Herd Management

# A Sad Spinners Yarn

**A few weeks ago I met a woman who told me the following story.**

She is a spinner and had been very keen to spin alpaca fleece, so went along to one of our regions studs to buy some. The stud owner apparently didn't have any scales so judged the fleece weights by juggling a bag in each hand and saying "that would be about right" or words to that effect. At \$80 a kilo of raw fleece, that seems a strange way to sell fleece.

The stud owner told the spinner that most of the fleece had already gone to the co-op but that what she had was wonderful and everyone would want to buy it from her.

The spinner went home and instead of having a great experience she found the fleeces full of sticks and rubbish. Naturally she was disheartened and upset by the whole sorry business and asked me if I could advise her about spinning alpaca. She thought it was she who was the problem.

To try and rectify the situation I gave her a bag of my own carded fleece and suggested she try it. After examining and feeling it she was delighted with the look and feel and promptly bought a large bag from me as well. Two nights later I got a very happy phone call from her - she said "I just had to call and tell you how beautiful alpaca is to spin and what a great result I am getting".

I have some of the fleece she was sold - so that I can clean it and card it for her - it is a nice fleece but the tips are full of burr and she has already pulled out heaps of sticks and vegetable matter. I do know which stud it is and who sold her the fleece.

Unfortunately this is not the only woeful story that I have been told, all along similar lines, different studs but always the same end result - big disappointment for the spinners who are disgusted with the way they are treated and the money they have wasted. They also talk a lot and are happy to tell all their spinning friends NOT to bother spinning alpaca. It can be hard getting spinners to spin alpaca - but if you sell them good quality they do love it and will come back for more. Making a quick buck at their expense is only going to hurt the alpaca people, and the spinners don't get to use a beautiful product.

I am being positive and presuming that these things usually happen because growers are not aware of what spinners want - so maybe you could follow these simple tips:-

- When selling fleece, take it out of its bag and turn it onto a table or clean floor so that the spinner can have a good look at its length, and condition.
- Have scales for weighing (spinners are used to paying much less for lovely sheep's fleeces).
- Keep your prices reasonable.

If these principles are followed then no doubt the spinners will enjoy what they achieve with the fleeces and will be back for more .

*Penny Pearce  
Goulburn*

## MURRUMBATEMAN FIELD DAYS 2004 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2004

**The Murrumbateman Field Days is one of the premier display events in the Southern NSW Region Calender.**

***It is an excellent opportunity to network and directly market and promote the breed and in particular, your own stud to the wider community.***

As numbers are limited please contact: **Geoff McGowan-Lay 6227 6224**, as soon as possible to secure your stud a site at this years event – cost \$55 per pen site – all under cover.

# *A Veterinary Practitioner's Perspective of the Alpaca Industry*

**Alpaca have been a significant part of my professional life for the past fifteen years. My first exposure to the alpaca in 1989 was followed by the AAA seminar at Tocal and Sydney Veterinarians' seminar in 1991. Since then alpaca have been an increasingly significant component of my veterinary practice in Victoria. I have had the good fortune to be involved with significant breeders like Shanbrooke and been close to industry developments generally. Following my recent move to the Southern Highlands I am interested in continuing my relationship with alpaca.**

Over this period the emphasis of veterinary work has changed from the concentration on medical and surgical problems of the individual alpaca to the broad herd health issues confronting alpaca as a production animal. Initially a significant effort was devoted to dental problems, liver disease, bone deformities, lameness, and other diseases concerning individual animals. From this important experience, veterinarians have developed a sound awareness of the requirements of alpaca at the herd level dealing with issues such as parasite control, pasture management, nutritional requirements and disease control – epidemiology in fact .

This development can be followed in specific diseases such as Facial Eczema, limb deformities and Johnes Disease. Carpal Valgus, for instance, used to be of such import to the highly valued individual animal that surgical intervention was applied whereas now the genetic and nutritional components are of much greater concern.

Obviously the impetus for this change has been the increasing numbers of commercial alpaca, the relative value of individual production alpaca, and in some degree the type of veterinarians remaining involved in the alpaca industry. Initially the Camelid Veterinary Association comprised some 30 vets, at its peak attracted some 90 attendees at conferences in the mid 90s and has since returned to more modest numbers. Interestingly, most of the original members are still working with alpaca.

It will be no surprise that over this period the number of alpaca owners has increased substantially and that the demand of veterinarians with alpaca skills has increased proportionally. The nett effect of these factors is that while the demand for vets with broad alpaca experience capable of offering herd health advice has increased, the number of alpaca experienced vets with these skills has actually decreased.

The investigation of reproductive issues in the alpaca follows this development. Initially, the concern was with the infertility issues affecting individual alpaca. The information which emerged has now

been applied towards the issues involved in artificial reproduction – the tools to manage population genetics – semen storing, artificial insemination, embryo transfer. Certainly my experience would mirror that development. For the first several years I was involved in investigations of infertile alpaca, then spent four years of intensive investigation of embryo transfer and superovulation. To its credit the alpaca industry in Australia (unlike in the USA) has taken up the opportunities offered by embryo transfer and will undoubtedly seize upon future developments in artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization and cloning.

Interestingly, one aspect of the alpaca industry which has not changed is the process of animal health purchase examination. For the entire period of my alpaca experience there has been an industry acceptance of a health insurance examination as a precursor to purchase or insurance. However there is a vast difference between a health check and a purchase examination which has not been addressed by the industry. An insurance health examination determines whether or not the animal is of good health whereas a purchase examination fully describes the individual including any flaws which may not be a health consideration but may be very important to the purchase such as a kinked tail. Such a purchase examination is routinely applied to other farm species and is a puzzling deficit in the alpaca industry. It may be because alpaca breeders consider themselves better qualified to assess an alpaca than veterinarians or it may reflect the difficulty in obtaining the services of veterinarians experienced in alpaca. There are interesting cases in support of both views.

It is in this context that I have established a veterinary practice dealing with alpaca in the Southern Highlands. I live in the ACT and understand the geographical diversity of alpaca holdings in the area will require extensive traveling – no surprise to a large animal veterinarian. I can offer the full range of veterinary services from detailed consultation regarding individual alpaca including ultrasound and surgery to routine herd management and whole herd advice. I am happy to comment on email enquiries regarding alpaca problems generally.

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# Successful Pasture Management

by Rob Harborne MAppIsc(Agric)

**The aim of being successful as a grazier requires the manager to be successful in the task of growing grass. Growing grass is the engine room in driving the profitability and sustainability of the grazing system.**

Once grass can be grown then it is up to the capacity of the manager to maximize the benefit of this resource. It is very important to understand what the ideal requirements of the animal are, how much energy they require and what the pastures can achieve at various stages of growth.

It should always be the objective of the manager to keep the animals above a reasonable condition score in order to maintain the animals' productivity, their capacity to breed, and their capacity to maximize weight gain and fibre production.

## *Quality Grass + Animals = Profit and Sustainability*

**There are 7 major areas that need to be covered:**

1. The soil
2. Pasture selection
3. Grazing management
4. Fertilizer application
5. Physical farm layout
6. Sowing techniques
7. Weed and pest control

### **1. The Soil**

<b>MAJOR NUTRIENTS</b>	<b>SOIL PH</b>
<b>PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS</b>	<b>ORGANIC MATTER</b>
<b>SOIL</b>	

The soil is the foundation for the grass factory, the foundation for the production system. If it is limiting in any of the key nutrients, pH or trace elements, then the potential of the pasture that is there or the one that is to be sown will be lessened.

Whenever starting the process of increasing the productivity of a grazing enterprise it is imperative to soil test all the relevant paddocks and have the results interpreted by a qualified person.

If the pH needs to be corrected then lime needs to be applied. The key to pH rectification is that it will take time and moisture to react with the soil in order to rectify soil acidity.

Major nutrients such as phosphorous, nitrogen and sulfur are crucial in the growth of pastures.

Trace elements are also very important in optimizing pasture growth, especially molybdenum, which assists in legumes functioning more effectively.

### **2. Pasture Selection**

Selection of the appropriate pasture species will be dependent upon soil conditions, animal production goals, and climatic conditions.

The options will be basically divided into short, medium and long-term pasture types. The short-term pasture varieties offer high productivity but low persistence in comparison to the longer term pasture blends.

Lucerne is also a very important component of any pasture mix as either parts of the blend or on its own. Every grazing operation should have some of their farming area available to lucerne for its capacity to respond after summer rain, its protein and its ability to produce high quality feed.

The other group that should be mentioned is the large range of oats and even grazing wheats that are now available that offer opportunities to provide significant sources of feed during the colder months from May-August.

### **3. Grazing Management**

Grazing management is crucial to turning the grass into profit. Understanding the factors that affect the quality and the quantity of the feed will directly affect the profitability of the grazing operation.

Production goals should be aligned to the pasture system that is being developed. For example a breeding operation will have possibly a longer term pasture sown than a fattening operation that may utilize a high productive short term pasture to provide maximum possible weight gain.

Graze pastures so that groundcover is always maintained at a minimum of 70%. The height of the pasture should be grazed between 10-20 cm. If the pastures grow in excess of 20cm in height then digestibility is greatly decreased thus decreasing the productivity benefit of those pastures.

### **4. Fertilizer Application**

Product selection or the type of fertilizer to be used is very important. Mostly single super phosphate is the main product used in pasture systems as it provides phosphorous, sulphate and calcium.

Rate is dependent upon the soil test results and the production goals targeted. As a general guide, 1kg of P per Dry Sheep Equivalent per Ha. For example if the property is running 12DSE per Ha then 150 kg SSP should be applied just to maintain current production. If the pasture productivity wants to be increased an annual application of 250kg per Ha should be adopted. The rates will vary dependent upon the soil test results.

Timing should be in early autumn or early spring. If nitrogen is to be used for grass based pastures then it should be applied at post grazing and at least 10-14 days prior to grazing.

**NB:** Urea if ingested directly can cause death to livestock.

## 5. Physical Farm Layout

To maximize grazing benefit it is important to be able to apply significant grazing pressure to the paddocks. This means that the average paddock size should be somewhere between 5-10 Ha. This does increase stock movements but it also does increase the quantity and quality of the feed produced from those paddocks.

It also has another benefit by mowing the paddocks, causing germination of weeds to be uniform, making control a lot more consistent.

Lane ways are also extremely useful in assisting stock movement and labor requirements.

## 6. Sowing Techniques

There is a guide to the successful sowing of pastures but there are a few key elements to success:

- Eliminate physical problems such as hard pans or crusting.
- Weed control
- Pest control especially Red Legged Earth Mite
- Seed placements
- Pasture selection
- Newly sown management- don't overgraze a newly sown pasture
- Follow up fertilizer application to encourage the best possible root and plant growth.
- Contractors should be located who have the appropriate equipment to maximize the efficiency of the task.

## 7. Weed and Pest Control

Control of all weeds is most effective before the weeds get too big. The larger the weeds, the harder they are to kill.

Always follow label recommendations and try and use professional weed sprayers to ensure paddock coverage is achieved, water rates are appropriate and the spray tank is not contaminated with another chemical.

There are various techniques that can be used such as spray grazing and spray topping. It is all about reducing the weed seed burden in the paddock. A

strong thriving pasture will compete with, and beat, smaller weed populations.

The red legged earth mite is a pest that has the potential to destroy thriving pasture stands, especially the legume component of the pasture mix. They are very easy and cost effective to control. Newly sown pastures are very susceptible and may need to be sprayed several times.

## Take Home Messages

- Soil test before a pasture improvement program is commenced.
- Select pasture types that will best suit your production goals and your conditions.
- Be aware of the benefit of the quality of the pasture sward in achieving production goals.
- If you don't feed the pasture it won't grow to its maximum potential. Use the appropriate levels of fertilizer. Nutrients are essential to maximise growth.
- Ensure that the paddocks are somewhere between 5-10 Ha depending upon the size of the operation.
- When sowing new pastures follow all the required steps to ensure success. Also use contractors with the correct equipment.
- Weed and pest control is most effective when it is done early. Always use the correct chemicals at the correct rates.
- Be observant of what is happening in the paddock. Genetics is important but the quality and the quantity of the pastures grown will determine the benefit that the genetics can provide.
- **If you do what you have in the past then you will only ever achieve what you have always achieved. To achieve a more productive, sustainable and profitable grazing system then change will be required. Think the same way as your breeding programme, if you never look for genetic improvement then it is unlikely that you will ever achieve that improvement that we all strive for.**

**Rob Harborne** MAppSc(Agric)

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# *Two Years Down The Track*

*by Helen Shephard - Alpaca Partners Yass*

**When Geoff and I entered the Alpaca industry over ten years ago, we like many other new breeders, were informed that alpacas do well on small acres. This appeared to be a great opportunity for us to get into the industry and start our own little herd on our six acres.**

We ventured down to Victoria to our first National Show and Auction and purchased our first alpaca in 1993. However, one wasn't enough and as our herd grew and multiplied we found that we required more land. Our neighbours were fantastic as they adored these magnificent creatures as much as we did, so seized the chance to have their own proxy herd when we asked to lease more land.

Our land wasn't fantastic and it didn't take long before we had to hand feed twice daily, which wasn't a chore as we viewed it as an opportunity to get to know the animals better and I believe provided us with an eye to pick up any problems that the alpacas encountered. Frequently this occurred long before they actually showed any signs of ill health.

Over time we were finding that some of our animals were coming down with various worm problems such as tapeworm and hermuncas worm. We unfortunately lost a female with this problem soon after birthing and had to hand rear the cria, however, we saved a number of others who encountered the problem over time due to diligent monitoring.

We ascertained that our animals just didn't have enough land to graze on and they were eating around the poo piles as this was where the best feed could be had. We were picking up the poo regularly, however, they would just move the piles and eat where they had been. It was time to take action if we wished to remain alpaca breeders.

So in May 2001 we packed up and moved down to Yass onto eighty acres of native grasses. The 30 animals were beside themselves, they hit the paddocks running. The girls had 20 acres to themselves and wandered around aimlessly all day with their heads down. We could rotate the paddocks as frequently or infrequently as we liked depending on the feed.

The boys had 10 acres and they thought they were in seventh heaven even though they had to share the paddocks with the resident kangaroos. The weaners (tuis) were far enough away from their mothers that they could see them so didn't worry too much at weaning time.

The hardest part for us was to stop feeding them as they had more food than they knew what to do with. Every time we went out into the paddocks they would still keep coming up so our relationship with them didn't change. We even had to get some sheep in to help eat some of the feed.

Now two years down the track we are finding that our animals are healthier than ever. They never eat around the poo piles so there is less risk of them acquiring worm problems. With regular monitoring we have not had to worm the animals since moving here. Before we left our property in the Hawkesbury we took extra special precautions, under the advice of our Veterinary Surgeon, to ensure we didn't bring the worm problem down to Yass with us.

The animals have not required supplementary feeding which has been an added bonus and the cria are a lot bigger and more active at birth than they were previously. Furthermore, our veterinary bills are a lot less as there is not a lot of problems that we have encountered that I haven't been able to deal with.

Since our move we have ascertained that alpaca are like other animals, especially sheep where they need the room to browse and eat. It is fine to have small acres but the animals should not be too restricted to allow them the opportunity to move about the acres ensuring they are not eating around their poo piles.

I am not advocating that everyone should move to the country and bigger acres but people need be aware of the problems that they may encounter when their small herd starts to increase and they are supplementary feeding every day. They need to be mindful of the problems that can arise in this type of situation. Even picking up the poo daily doesn't solve the worm problem.

Unfortunately, regular worming does cause added problems as the worms become resistant to the worming mixtures that are being continuously administered.

I am happy to talk to people about our experiences and believe that by sharing our knowledge and experiences with others hopefully they will not be subjected to some of the problems that we encountered with our animals.

# Who's looking after us?

Peter Bishop - Leranda Ridge Alpacas

**Before purchasing your first alpacas, a great deal of legwork, homework and research needs to be carried out.**

Questions like -

- 'what are their feed requirements?'
- 'what type of fencing do they require?'
- 'do I have a good water supply?'
- 'what shelter do I have on my property?'
- 'am I going to breed alpacas or have a wether herd?'
- 'what number of animals can I run on my property?'

need to be asked - and the list goes on and on.

However there is always the purchaser that lets their hearts do the talking (which is easy enough to do). These people can fall into many traps and often what they thought was an excellent bargain turns out not to be so.

Finding out some knowledge of the purpose of the Australian Alpaca Association and information on what it means to be a registered member should be one of the first goals for a new breeder. The question 'are the animals I'm purchasing registered with the AAA?' should always be asked before a purchase takes place and proof should be able to be given. If buying pregnant females ask to see the covering sires certification, as a cria born by an uncertified sire cannot be registered.

All this information needs to be obtained, as there are many pitfalls, which can lead to disinterest and neglect on the purchasers behalf. In some cases the urgency to sell animals overrides the fact that sales should be made honestly.

We have recently (6 months ago) been called upon to take in a herd of 10 neglected animals, all suffering various degrees of starvation. Believe me, to see the animals that we all love in this condition is very distressful.

## ***A Woman's Prayer:***

*Dear Lord, I pray for:*

*Wisdom, To understand a man*

*Love, To forgive him and*

*Patience, For his moods*

*Because, Lord, if I pray for Strength*

*I'll just beat him to death.*

Circumstances leading to this were somewhat complicated. The animals were left in the care of a neighbour while the owners were away. The neighbour obviously had very little, if any, experience with livestock and was left with minor details on their feeding regime and absolutely no pasture on his property. In the meantime one of the owners had a bad accident preventing their return, therefore the carer felt responsible to continue feeding the herd. Due to the carers lack of experience and knowledge the animals continued to suffer.

These are the chain of events which led to the owner's request for help. When a request like this is made, the answer 'no' is not an option. Even though we are completely hand feeding our own herd, we took these animals in and proceeded to care for them.

There is a happy ending to the journey for these once quite sick animals - we have found very good homes for nearly all of them, even though some of the females and crias are unregistered, and, the owners have always kept in touch and paid agistment.

The moral of this very sad situation is to always buy from a reputable breeder who can show you proof of all registrations and certifications and most importantly, provide back up assistance.

Your purchase is your responsibility while ever you own the alpacas.



*Silcron Trojan Warrior  
about to turn left!*

# *From Birth to Six Months at Lillyfield*

*by Carolyn Austin*

**The is a general guide to the first six months of a cria's life, it does not deal with life threatening situation or the health of the mother - but is a basic starter article written for new breeders and is a reflection of what happens at Lillyfield Alpacas, all things being well and a normal healthy delivery.**

## **Day 1**

So the Cria has arrived, safe and well, what happens now?

- Make sure that the cria is in a safe place, is not likely to get caught in a fence or roll under a fence – they seem to do a lot of thrashing around when first trying to stand.
- Check that the nose and mouth are free of mucous and the cria is breathing well.
- Check the umbilicus, make sure it has stopped bleeding – remember it is a direct source of infection straight into the blood stream of the cria – an umbilical clamp is often a handy thing to have, many breeders also tip the umbilicus in an iodine solution to prevent infection. Tip – if you don't have a clamp a piece of tightly tied cotton will work wonders.
- A good idea is to vigorously (but not violently) towel the cria down, helps to dry them off and stimulates breathing and circulation.
- When all is settled and mum has had a rest, give her a feed it sometimes helps.
- You now need to check her teats.
  - It is very common for a wax plug to be on each of the teats of the udder.
  - Remove them with a twist, and a rub – sometimes a warm/hot (not scolding) washer helps.
  - Next try and get the milk supply working – it requires some practice and is akin to milking a mouse, but the end result is worth it if you find a good supply of colostrum on your hand. Rub it back on the udder – this leaves a smell for the cria to find.
- Now you need to observe the cria and make sure that after a suitable time, sometimes an hour, it is attempting to stand – this is an amusing time and worth staying home for.
- Within four hours of birth the cria should be attempting to feed. Watch for latching on, check the mouth afterwards, and be mindful that maidens often don't get their milk supply for sometime; whilst with the experienced mums it is often there right from the beginning.
- **The role of colostrum cannot be over emphasised.** A Cria has only 36 hours to absorb

all of the required antibodies from mum's milk and the 36 hours is on a sliding scale of effectiveness. If in doubt that mum has milk, or the cria is too tired to drink, the suggestion is to give colostrum replacer (available from your Vet) sooner rather than latter.

- All is well, now it time to enjoy – just keep an eye out for a cria that sits too much or a mother that does not want to feed.

## **Day 2**

- Check the cria's stomach to make sure it is getting enough. Feel just behind the rib cage, it should not feel hollow
- Watch for the passing of the Meconium plug from the anus, failure to pass the plug can result in serious complications, failure to feed, lethargy etc. Sometimes a very gentle laxative is required.

## **Day 14**

- Your cria has now bonded well with its mother, been driving the other mothers crazy and has found a few special little mates to play with – feeding is well established and good progressive weight gain is happening.
- At day 14 it is time to mate mum again. Keep the cria out of the road (but not out of site) – a rather excitable male can seriously damage a little cria, but if the cria is taken away mother will often be upset.
- Day 14 is also a good time to give the cria the once over, checking to see the umbilicus is healing well and the cria has had good weight gain. Be suspicious of a boney cria – mum probably doesn't have enough milk and supplementary feeding may be required.
- At day 14 we also give 1 mil of AD & E. AD & E promotes good bone formation and food processing – particularly for crias growing through the dark winter and after this long drought period.

## **Day 45 (6 weeks)**

- At day 45 we also give another 1 mil of AD & E and the first 5 in 1 vaccinations. The vaccination is again a variety of health problem, eg Tetanus.
- Again check for well being and good growth rates.

## **Day 70 (10 weeks)**

- At day 70 we also give another 1 mil of AD & E and the second 5 in 1 vaccinations.
- Again check for well being and good growth rates.