



Photo by De Monson

## Want to Grow Your Farm Business?

# *Five Reasons why you need to attend next year's Natural Fiber Extravaganza*

By Jay Reeder

There are basically two types of businesses - and alpaca farms. One has figured out how to succeed and grow revenue, while the other is still searching for that answer.

According to the experts, 70 percent of small businesses will not last 10 years. Apparently, most of us never find the solution before throwing in the towel. Some are too busy working the business to develop new revenue streams, some have never been exposed to successful models, and others may be undercapitalized, lacking the funds to expand.

One thing everyone can agree upon is the importance of figuring out how to build a thriving farm business that can overcome these obstacles.

At the 2018 Natural Fiber Extravaganza, the farms in attendance represented both camps well. All were passionately engaged in the effort to explore ways of growing their business and unlocking new keys to success. A fascinating outcome of that event was revealed in feedback from attendees that arrived in the weeks after everyone went home. Those emails gave a glimpse into the process that moves a farm from one camp to the other, and those insights were the inspiration for this list. Every farm can benefit from this list to follow the same path.

Those who have figured out the success formula for their farm business also know our world is changing so quickly a business must reinvent itself every few years. They are always on the lookout for the next innovation.

So, whether you have found your success formula or not, this list of five reasons why you need to attend next year's Natural Fiber Extravaganza will apply.

## Reason #1

To succeed, you should try to be “around” others who have succeeded.

It may sound simplistic but consider this analogy. If you want to get in shape, do you have better odds hanging out with friends who frequent a buffet restaurant, or meeting up with friends who live at your local gym? Similarly, if you want to be successful with your farm business, you should spend time with someone who has already walked that path and knows the way. Studies have consistently shown you will become like the people you surround yourself with. One famous quote says you are “the average of the five people you spend the most time with.”

The impact of spending time with successful peers includes:

- 1) Being exposed to new ways of thinking and different solutions.
- 2) Self-esteem and self-confidence improves when you see what is possible.
- 3) Willpower is strengthened, and limits expanded.
- 4) Expectations can explode.
- 5) Access to opportunities and resources previously unknown.

If you want to succeed and grow revenue for your farm, one way to increase the odds is to be around others who

have already done this. There is no better forum than the Natural Fiber Extravaganza, and feedback from attendees has confirmed this to be a great benefit of attendance. Anyone who is serious about their farm business cannot afford to miss this once-per-year opportunity to build relationships with people who will improve their “average of the five people you spend the most time with.”

You will also build relationships with other alpaca farmers who are facing similar challenges. After the last Natural Fiber show, West Coast farms were collaborating with East Coast farms to solve problems and improve operations regarding agritourism. The farms near you may not be facing the same issues, or due to proximity, they consider you a competitive threat. By connecting with farms around the country, one can build a support network that is facing the same issues and is eager to collaborate.

## Reason #2

Education seminars by people with success formulas who are willing to share

One purpose of the Fiber Extravaganza is to bring together people from across the industry to share insights and lessons they have learned for the benefit of all. The people hosting these workshops are primarily those who have figured out how to grow their farm business and have a story to tell. If you are still searching for your success formula, this is one of the easiest ways to find it. There are workshops on everything from agritourism to manufacture of fiber products, with no shortage of topics to feed your passion.



Photo by De Monson



Photo by Malcom Ault

Following this last Natural Fiber Extravaganza, two of the farms that reached out after attending the agritourism seminar provided perfect examples of the potential impact on your farm business. Each offered positive feedback on how attending the workshop transformed his or her farm business.

One has been in the industry for decades and commented on how quickly they were able to start generating new revenue after attending the seminar. Within two weeks of getting home, they had sold over 24 tours and seen expanded farm store sales. They reported being “pretty blown away!” and “finally in a position to actually do this!”

The other farm was brand-new to alpacas, with their first alpacas scheduled to arrive on the property around a month after the Natural Fleece Extravaganza show. Having attended the fiber show’s agritourism seminar in mid-July, they planned to launch their farm business with National Alpaca Farm Days, around 10 weeks later. This was roughly six weeks after first having alpacas on the farm. When the NAFD weekend was over, they

reached out and reported that sales exceeded \$400 each day, and that “This business is amazing!” How many alpaca farms can report the same success within weeks of receiving their first alpacas? The new alpaca owners commented they “are definitely getting even more motivated now... and you’re totally right in your [agritourism] presentations.”

### Reason #3

Beyond the seminars, there’s an education in visiting vendor booths.

Most serious retailers have buyers that attend their industry shows for new product and sales ideas. The product mix and margins can make or break any business. Whether you are doing market research on best selling products, looking for new style or product ideas, or simply wanting to expand your shop with higher margin items, you will not be disappointed with the variety. There is no better place to see the latest trends in alpaca product sales by those in the industry than our own Natural Fiber Extravaganza.

Looking around the most recent show, there were unique items not commonly seen at local or regional shows. For example, designer alpaca t-shirts, wholesale alpaca jewelry and custom “fiber project bags” were all big hits. Beyond the vendor booths, a fashion show offered the opportunity to see many of the season’s new products come to life. Styles change quickly, and it is essential to stay on top of the latest trends.

The best market research comes from merely speaking to the vendors. This again is an opportunity to learn from those who have figured out their formula for success. One insightful tip could save years of frustration or help earn thousands in revenue. The vendors at this show are wholesale vendors looking to help you grow your business. When you sell more, they sell more.

### Reason #4

Get away from the farm and spend a few days immersed in your business.

Everyone has heard that if you keep doing what you have always done, you will keep getting the same results. So, if you want a better outcome, you must do something new.

Getting off the farm helps in more ways than one. Studies repeatedly show creativity is directly influenced by travel. Looking deeper into how the most significant



breakthroughs came to be, you learn inspiration is often born from changing your environment and letting your subconscious work on the problem for you. Travel allows you to focus on the new experiences and that creates the thought patterns that lead to breakthrough ideas.

That is why many business experts recommend annual retreats for corporate leadership. When planning the future of your business, it is not simply good enough to get away from distractions. You must be intentional about putting yourself in an environment that will lead to breakthrough and innovations. Take a few days off from counting alpaca beans so you can immerse yourself in new ideas about your business and surround yourself with others who are passionate about this industry. There is no better way to set the stage for inspiration, creativity, and breakthrough strategy that leads you to higher levels of success.

### ■ Reason #5

Be involved in advancing the industry while connecting with peers.

The Natural Fiber Extravaganza also hosts the AOA annual meeting. This is an opportunity to connect with the latest trends in the industry and identify opportunities or needs to be filled. From the industry keynote speech to the annual report, there are insights each year that could advance any alpaca farm business. Opportunities could come in the form of hearing someone talk about a common need, or it could come through an invitation to serve the industry in a way that opens doors or helps with education.

As a member of this industry, every farm can consider every other farm to be either supplier or customer. By participating in the annual meeting, you are advertising your farm to every other farm in attendance. You also sig-

nal you are working to be one of those successful farms they would want to connect with. The relationships forged in that environment will be more meaningful and more impactful on your farm business.

---

### ■ Summary

Alpaca owners are privileged to live the alpaca lifestyle. However, as with all things, there are the parts we love and the parts we cannot avoid. Those statistics on small business failure are ugly. Nobody needs to tell you that being a small business owner can be tough and that being a successful alpaca farmer can be even tougher.

Every farm is doing what they can to stack the odds in their favor, but it is important to realize you are not alone. AOA has created an event designed to help you grow your business, and this event is helping to energize farms around the country. The above list contains just a few observations from feedback provided by attendees of the last Natural Fiber Extravaganza. Their positive outcomes led to this list of five reasons why you need to attend the Natural Fleece Extravaganza, and how it will help guide your farm to succeed. Other farms could likely add to this list, but it only takes one breakthrough idea to elevate your farm business to higher levels of success with a lifelong impact. ■

---

Jay Reeder, with his wife, Melissa, owns Apple Mountain Alpacas near Clarkesville, Georgia. The couple are parents of three active boys. Jay has founded several internet-based technology companies over the last couple of decades. He currently directs two tech companies and a non-profit (in addition to his work on the farm), while being active on the boards of several non-profits in his community, and helping to coach other organizations, both locally and around the world. Melissa is privileged to work full time on the farm, devoting herself (along with the kids) to the raising of these amazing alpacas. They can be reached through their website, [www.applemountainalpacas.com/](http://www.applemountainalpacas.com/).