

TM
lamalink.com

your connection to the llama world

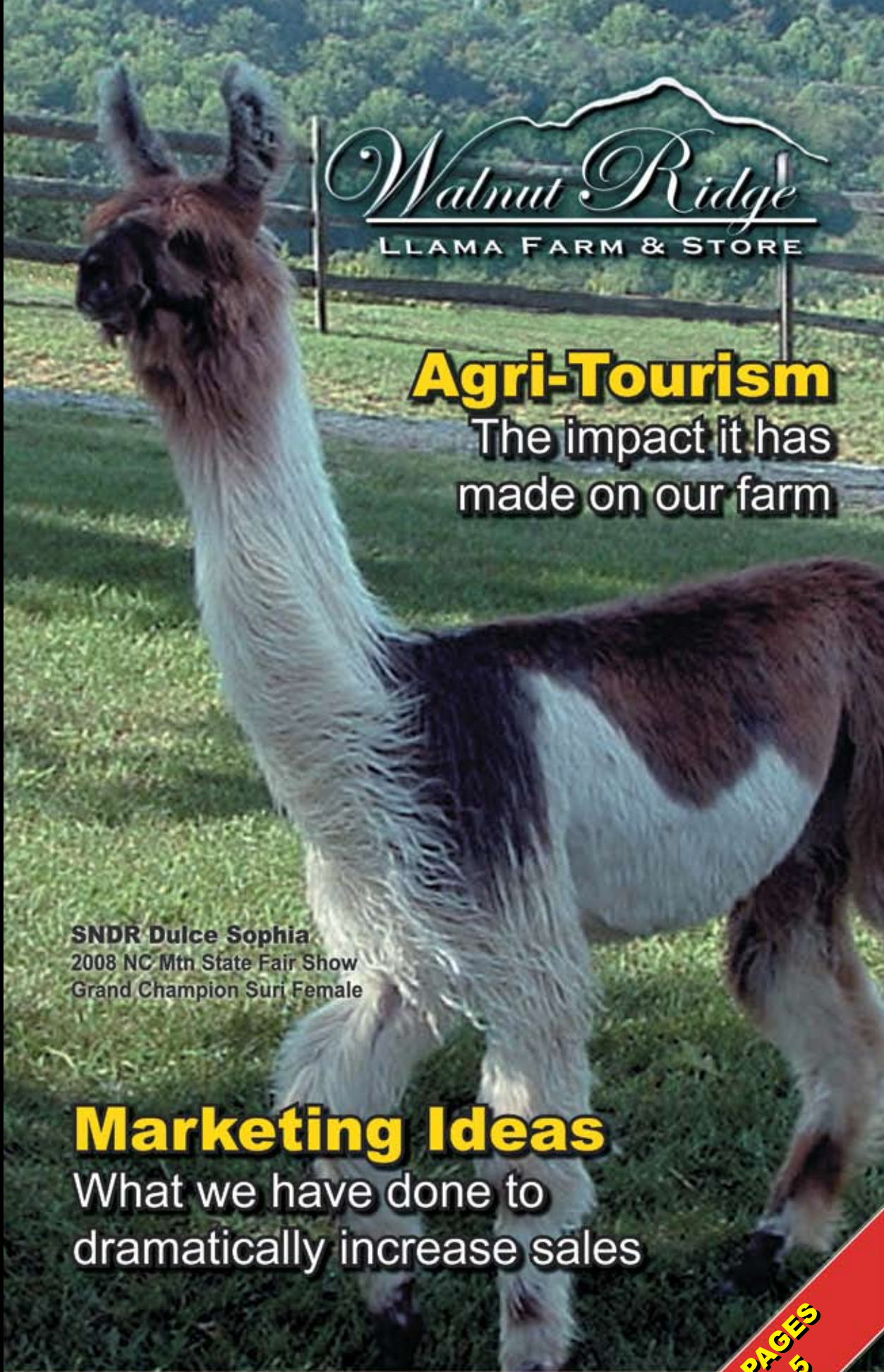
FEBRUARY 2009

Interview with
Courtnee and
Robin Benson

Monastic
Fleece

Stressed Out!

www.lamalink.com



Walnut Ridge
LLAMA FARM & STORE

Agri-Tourism

The impact it has
made on our farm

SNDR Dulce Sophia
2008 NC Mtn State Fair Show
Grand Champion Suri Female

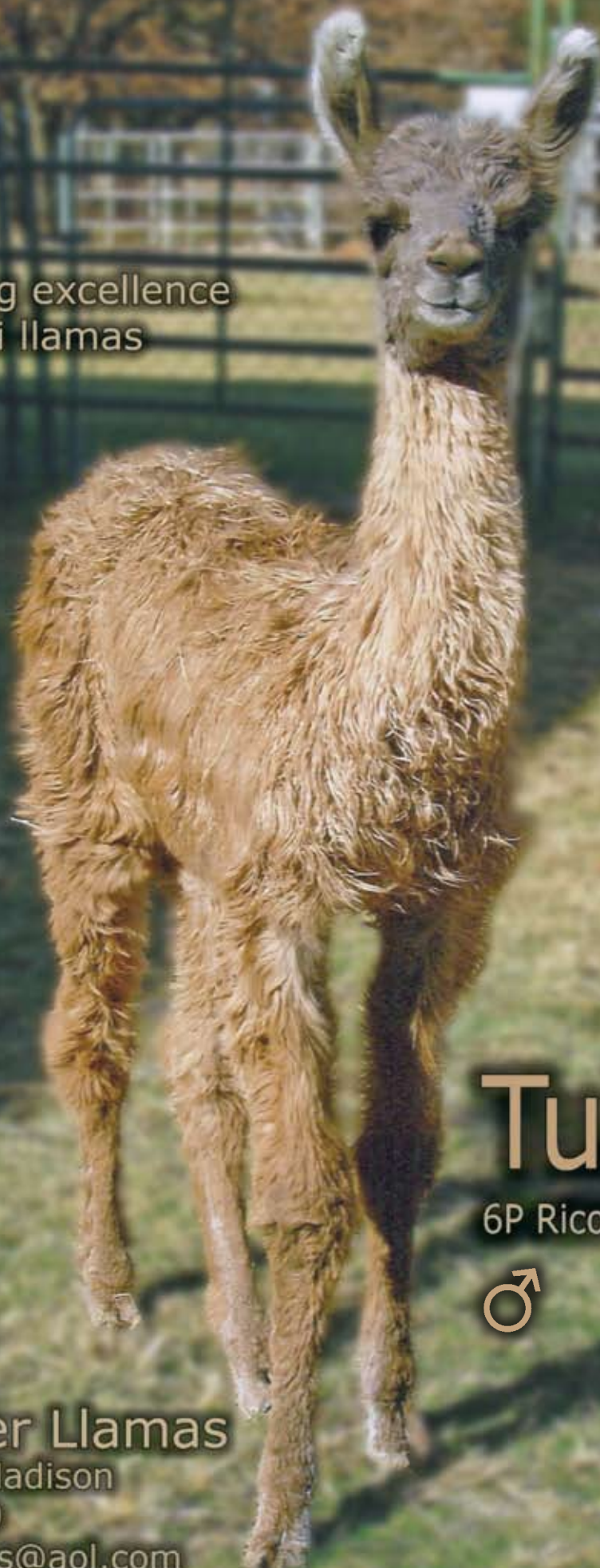
Marketing Ideas

What we have done to
dramatically increase sales

www.QualityLlamas.com

**SEE PAGES
4 & 5**

Celebrating excellence
in suri llamas



Tu Shay

6P Ricochet x Queen Celine



Leon River Llamas

Dean & Ann Madison

254 442-1769

madisonllamas@aol.com





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FEBRUARY 2009

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by Sue Wilde



21 ...We decided to have a dye day. This wasn't to be just **any** dye day... this was to be a **natural** dye day. Natural dyes are dyes that are obtained from animals, plants, or minerals. Natural dying also means that it's a **whole** lot more work

Within Every Issue

12 Monastic Fleece is basically new to the Llama world – but at the same time — the industry is not new to us. As a Roman Catholic Monastic community of Monks and Nuns, we have always throughout history been “self-providers” and “farmers.”

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Walnut Ridge

LLAMA FARM & STORE

"Breeding A New Generation of Quality Llamas"



Jerry & Carolyn

Living The Llama Lifestyle

Jerry and Carolyn Ayers are celebrating their tenth year living the "llama lifestyle." They live on a 19 acre farm in the small community of Chuckey located in the foothills of Northeast Tennessee with the Smoky Mountains in full view. Jerry has been a high school principal for the last nine years and Carolyn, a thirteen year veteran of teaching elementary school, retired early three years ago to manage the llama farm and store. They started out with two companion llamas in 1998 and now have a herd of silky and suri llamas that reached a peak of 60 llamas in the summer of 2007. Their llama sales have increased dramatically within the last five years reaching an all-time high of 28 llamas sold in 2007. Walnut Ridge Llamas & Store has been featured in several local and regional newspaper articles, Llama Crossing (online magazine), Llama Link, and Grit Magazine. They believe that a comprehensive approach to marketing will allow even small to medium farms achieve personal and farm financial goals. Debra and Brent Murray, llama owners who recently moved to Tennessee from Florida, joined the Ayers in a retail partnership called "The Llama Store."

Growing up in the Chuckey community, I spent many summers working on my grandparents' dairy farm. That experience influenced our decision to live on a farm and raise a variety of livestock. We purchased our first llamas in 1998, which changed our lives forever. Carolyn, originally from Jacksonville, Florida, was a certified city girl who rarely came to the barn unless baby animals were being born. The running joke around Walnut Ridge is "before llamas, I couldn't get Carolyn to come to the barn, but now I can't get her to come back to the house." Carolyn has definitely turned into a farm girl and would spend 24/7 with the llamas if she could. We have spent most of our married life of 30 years raising two children, working on college degrees, and educating children. Our shared passion for llamas has allowed us to find each other again, especially now that our two children are grown and I am approaching retirement years.

During the summer of 2000, we decided to upgrade our herd to more show quality llamas. We purchased the first members of our current foundation herd from Berry Acres Llamas (BAL). Dan and Dale Goodyear were instrumental in helping

us define our breeding philosophy and begin the development of a quality llama herd. Walnut Ridge Llamas currently has multiple Grand Champions and Best of Show llamas on the farm. Our herd of silky and suri llamas range between 50-60 llamas. We try to participate in 4-5 shows each year and attend most of the premium llama auctions, which include Celebrity Sales, LFA, and other production sales. The Walnut Ridge farm motto is "Breeding a New Generation of Quality Llamas." To be able to attain the standards of the motto, we have selected quality llama herdsires and foundation females that exhibit and produce the attributes that are important to the llama breed. Being educators, we are very interested in the genetic history of llamas. We research the bloodlines very closely before we purchase new additions to the herd. We believe in

the strong and true bloodlines of the past, which is why we purchased

Rising Star Antonio from the Goodyear's breeding program, **Piano Man** from the Milton's/Jones' breeding programs, and **Cornucopia (Silverspirit)** from the Gerkin's/Kennel's breeding programs. Blending these proven fiber-rich bloodlines with our current new suri bloodlines, such as **Dutch Flat's Rolling Stone** and **Windshire's**

Thunderous Applause (Newevo), has allowed us to enhance the quality of our fiber production and produce a marketable flashy look without sacrificing conformation. Our goal is to improve the quality of the silky and suri fiber in our



herd. The crias that we produce must have quality fiber on strong, correct frames with a body capacity to carry several healthy crias in the years to come.

Our passion for llamas has changed from a hobby in the early years into a true farm business. We raise llamas because we love the animals, but we have always felt that they needed to pay their way. We started out trying to follow what we called the "large farm model," but we lacked the assets and time to develop a national marketing plan of advertising, consignments, and procurement of high profile llamas. We just quietly visited farms and attended the premium auctions to build up a quality foundation llama herd with diverse bloodlines. We had to do our homework and couldn't afford to make purchasing mistakes. Although we have been raising llamas for ten years now, the last few years have been phenomenal in improved llama sales based on the size of our farm. I truly believe that we are on the edge of the next big boom in llama sales, and it will be led by the influx of baby boomers moving onto small farms. Four years ago we determined what our goals were as a couple and as a llama farm. We developed an action plan that allowed us

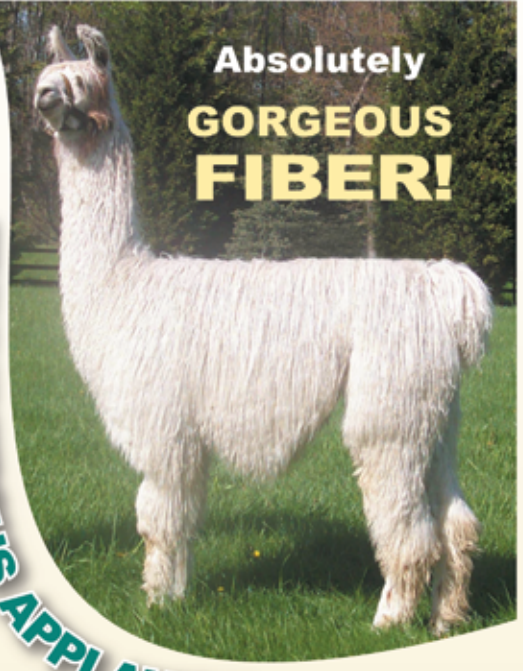
to market our llamas based on a "niche" that fit our personality and income level. We developed a comprehensive marketing strategy that involved regional and national networking, an online website presence, participation in online auctions, targeted advertisements, and a new concept called agri-tourism. Based on our research, we realized that we would have a better chance to promote the llama lifestyle and increase sales if more people visited our farm in person and virtually online. We believe that participation in national premium auctions and shows allow you to network with other llama farms. Networking is so important that we recently joined an online llama social network at LamaJournal.com. The sharing of ideas within the llama community provides the synergy to improve breeding

programs and increase growth of the industry. The traffic to our farm website has increased through the years directly influencing the growth of our llama sales. We also researched the merits of agri-tourism as an alternative way to increase farm income. We opened our farm up to the public as an agri-tourism site in the fall of

2005. Carolyn resigned from her teaching position to manage the farm and small store which was located in part of our house. We began to schedule field trips for local schools and church groups and had seasonal events at the farm. We did this for two years before deciding to build an actual store building on the farm. We wrote and received a matching agri-tourism grant for \$15,000 to help us build a 26x60 multi-purpose shelter that included an open pavilion area, retail shelter space, handicap accessible restrooms, a hand washing area, and an educational demonstration area. We opened the new store this fall (2008) with tremendous success. The store offers a variety of unique gifts including llama fiber/yarn, clothing made from llama/alpaca fiber, homemade soaps, honey jellies, llama gift baskets, pottery, woodcarvings,

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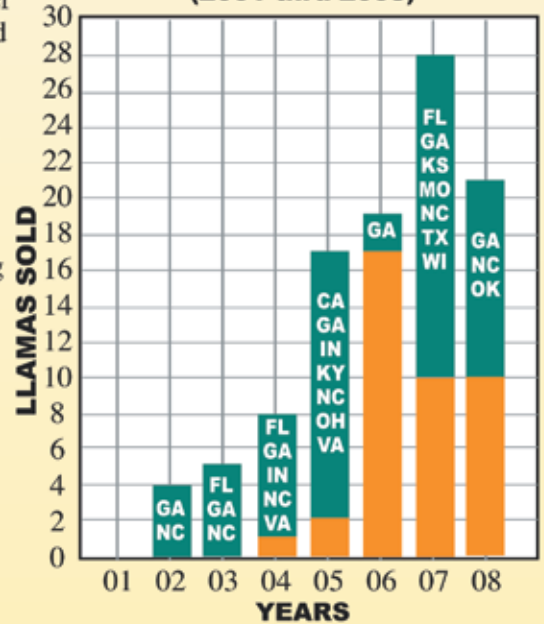
THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE



and antiques. We have already hosted tour buses, church groups, school groups, and many individuals and families. We had a brisk Christmas season and are now preparing for spring activities on the farm. We are very excited about our future with llamas. If we can answer any questions or help you with your dream, just give us a call. And remember, with llamas as the vehicle, the possibilities are endless!



WRLF Llama Sales (2001 thru 2008)



KEY
■ Local TN Sales
■ Out of State Sales