



working on a tumbler, which shakes out 60% of the dirt and cuts down on washing time. He's my engineer, builder, electrician, my everything. He does everything, including helping me work with the wool.

**RITA: You're originally from California. How did you end up here in Nebraska with a fiber mill?**

**JODY:** When I was 10 years old, my parents began buying fleece, dyeing it, and selling it to weaving shops in Northern California. That's how I learned.

My parents later retired to Washington state. I met Juan in California and lived there for several years, before we grew tired of city life and the violence that brings with it, and we decided to move. We picked Nebraska, where we could afford to buy a house and land.

In California, you can't afford to buy a house, let alone land. We've been here for 10 years now, and have had the farm for 3 years and the fiber mill for 1 year.

We started out milking for a dairy, which I think is pretty good for a city girl, but we wanted to own our own farm. Later my parents moved out here with us, and Dad stayed.

**RITA: It's wonderful to have someone here that can mentor you as you go, and give hands-on help as you need it. Can you tell us about the farm side of your business?**

**JODY:** We have sheep, cattle, 5 alpacas, and a few chickens. For the sheep, we have 47 ewes, 3 rams, and 24 lambs, and they're a mix of breeds – mostly we have Border Leicesters, Suffolks, and a Corriedale ram. We bought all but 9 sheep from Ruth Meyers. Our son Daniel, who is 17, and Juan do the cattle, and then Daniel also helps with the sheep.

We read the American Sheep Industry's Sheep Industry News [NS&GP member benefit], and there was an article about managing your sheep according to your resources. That's what we try to do. We feed lesser-quality prairie hay or second-cutting alfalfa-weed mix, and then feed them 15%-protein dried distillers grain instead of corn. We have it tested and check with our veterinarian to make sure we're feeding the right ration. We also feed grass clipping off our lawn in the summer and take grass clipping from 3 neighbors who don't spray their lawns. In exchange, they pick up manure from us for fertilizer for their gardens. We find inexpensive ways to save money, like putting a cattle-panel barrier on top of the feeder to keep the lambs from standing in the feeder and turning our garage into a barn.

**RITA: You are very innovative on the use of your resources on the farm and the use of your talents in building things for the fiber mill. You also have an idea for a new Central Nebraska Fiber Festival. How would this differ from the**

**annual Nebraska Sheep & Goat Conference put on by the NS&GP and the Scotts Bluff Valley Fiber Festival out in the Panhandle?**

**JODY:** We'd like to get the fiber artists together with producers. You get a taste of it with the Nebraska Sheep & Goat Conference, but that moves around the state from the east to the central to the panhandle every year and it has a broad focus

on the entire industry. And the Scotts Bluff fiber festival is so far west. I'd like to see a fiber festival here, not just the Panhandle. The Scotts Bluff fiber festival is great, but it serves mostly Western Nebraska and the states around there. Then, Eastern Nebraska goes to Iowa's fiber festival. There isn't anything for here in Central Nebraska.

We'd like for the fiber artists to have the opportunity to educate the producers on what practices would help them give wool more value, and for producers to educate fiber artists on the time, money, and energy it takes to produce wool. Fiber artists don't realize the work it takes to produce the sheep that produce the fiber, and producers don't realize how the fiber is used.

Wool has value, and it's more than 11 cents per pound. I've seen the effects of the wool market on local producer Ruth, who used to have 5,000 sheep. Three years ago, she was down to 1,500 head, and she only has 100 head now.

**RITA: What kind of information would you want to see at a future Central Nebraska Fiber Festival?**

**JODY:** Like Alex McClure was talking about at the 2009 conference about managing your sheep flock for wool production, and how the different things you do can affect wool quality and price you get for your wool.

**JUAN:** He was talking about not using plastic twine on hay bales because the pieces of twine end up in the clothes and that's scratchy. What we use is hay bales bound with hemp twine. It's biodegradable and the animals can eat it without any problems.

Or that the better you feed your animals, the better handle the wool has. If you think about building a house, you have to build the foundation and walls (sheep) right to be able to build a good roof (wool). You got to get the animals right.

**JODY:** We'd like to see something with classes for both producers and fiber artists. I'd like to see hands-on fiber classes, like letting producers sit down and try their hand at spinning and carding, and hands-on producer classes, too, like shearing, predator control, and a working dog trial.

## Meet Jody and Juan Yanez

on October 8-9

Plan to attend the 2010 Nebraska Sheep & Goat Conference on October 8-9 at Clay Center, where you can take part in working fiber during their hands-on demonstration, as well as discuss their and your ideas for a future Central Nebraska Fiber Festival.