

# Industry Guidance on Shearing

## for Farmers and Shearing Contractors

**Adult sheep should be shorn at least once every year to help reduce the risk of external parasites and to avoid heat stress. In the main, shearing is carried out to improve animal welfare rather than for the value of the wool. This guidance has been produced to remind farmers and shearing contractors to work together and ensure that sheep are handled appropriately to avoid stress and injury during the shearing process.**

### Presentation of Sheep

1. Prior to shearing, sheep should be kept calm to ensure the job can be done easily and efficiently.
2. Your handling systems must be designed so that sheep reach the shearers without stress or injury. Ensure experienced livestock handlers are on hand to assist.
3. Very full bellied sheep may experience discomfort when being shorn and will defecate on the shearing boards, making shearing more dangerous and clean fleeces harder to achieve. Take appropriate measures to ensure sheep presented for shearing do not have full stomachs. Achieving this will depend on several factors including the extent to which lambs are still suckling and whether lambs are weaned. Options could include penning without feed for at least 4 hours before shearing, or housing/yarding overnight with access to dry food and water.
4. Do not present the shearer with wet sheep.
5. Ensure that all sheep are clean of dags prior to shearing.
6. Ideally do not shear sheep until 8-12 weeks after lambing. Enlarged milk veins will make shearing more difficult and put sheep at risk.
7. If there are still lambs at foot, ensure that they are separated ahead of shearing and have had time to adjust.
8. Do not combine drenching, parasite control, or other procedures at the same time as shearing. This will increase stress levels, make sheep more difficult to shear, potentially waste money, and can cause harm to shearers if products are applied pre-shearing. Check any safe handling and application recommendations relating to treatments on the wool.
9. Be aware, if using a contractor, that your shearer could impose an additional charge for poorly presented sheep, which take additional, unnecessary time to shear.
10. When shearing sheep in the winter ensure that they are given adequate shelter until a covering of wool has regrown and weather conditions are suitable for turnout.

### Facilities for Shearing

11. A safe, level environment is needed to shear. Attempting to shear on a slope is both difficult and more physically demanding.
12. Provide a protected and safe power supply.
13. If the weather is hot provide the shearing team and sheep with shade and water.
14. If winter shearing, protect the shearing team and sheep from wind and rain.

## Using a Contractor

15. Check that your shearing contractor has a good reputation and shearers are suitably trained.
16. Shearers moving between farms can pose a biosecurity risk. Ensure shearers have cleaned down and disinfected before leaving the last farm and that they have changed trousers, singlets and moccasins. Farmers should assist shearers with cleaning and disinfecting procedures.
17. Challenge any inappropriate handling of sheep. Be prepared to instruct any shearer that may be behaving inappropriately to stop shearing. If the lead contractor is not present phone them immediately and explain any issues.

## Shearers and Shearing

18. Treat all animals calmly and with respect.
19. Only use safe and well-maintained machines and equipment to shear.
20. Clean and disinfect equipment before leaving premises (to avoid spreading caseous lymphadenitis (CLA), scab etc.).
21. Change clothing and moccasins if moving between farms and report any obvious cases of disease or parasites to the farmer or person with responsibility for the flock.
22. Shearing is a very physical job. Take care that everything possible is done to protect the personal health and safety of everyone involved in shearing.
23. Never shear under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
24. Initial training and regular refresher training is recommended. This can be obtained from British Wool in the UK.
25. When employing new shearers check references, training awards and/or get personal recommendations, if possible. Ensure that novice shearers are properly supervised, trained and competent.
26. Overseas shearers and those new to the team must be properly supervised, until it is established that they are capable of shearing competently and professionally.
27. In the unlikely event of an animal falling ill or getting injured, ensure the team is prepared in advance. Discussions are needed between the farmer and shearers to put an agreed procedure in place.
28. If contract shearing, be prepared to charge extra for badly presented sheep, dirty sheep, sheep with full bellies that display discomfort, or poor handling facilities. Likewise be prepared to leave the farm if a safe and secure area for shearing cannot be provided.
29. Challenge any inappropriate handling of sheep whether by shearers or farm staff. Be prepared to leave a farm that has stressed, or badly presented sheep for shearing.

**Shearing is hard work but if farmers and shearers can work together it can be done safely, efficiently, with high standards of animal welfare and can be a rewarding job, leaving all involved with a sense of pride.**

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