

# Stress Management in Your Sheep Operation

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## Nutrition and Health

- \* Provide appropriate nutritional requirements and feedstuffs management.
- \* Keep feed, water and handling equipment clean.
- \* Administer products via the preferred routes and in the preferred locations.
- \* Control coccidiosis.
- \* Control internal and external parasites.
  - Animals healthier and more resistant to other infections.
  - Lambs grow more efficiently.
  - Fewer carcass condemnations.
  - Lambs more susceptible to parasites than adult sheep.

## Management - Pregnancy

- \* Handle as little as possible.
- \* Avoid using dogs to move ewes.
- \* Avoid as much traffic (visitors) around the ewes as possible.
- \* Minimize the number of different people doing chores.

## Management - Shearing

- \* Select shearers who avoid cutting sheep.
- \* Timing - least a month before lambing.
- \* Prior to lambing additional feed required during cold weather.

## Management B Weaning Ewes

- \* 7 to 10 days before weaning, switch ewes on to a low quality roughage and terminate grain feeding to the ewes.
- \* Maintain the ewes on low quality roughage and avoid handling them for at least 10 to 14 days following weaning.
- \* If possible, bed the area where the ewes will rest heavily with straw to form a soft bed for the ewes to lay on.

## Management B Weaning Lambs

- \* Do vaccinations 10 days before.
- \* Keep in same environment.
- \* Remove ewes out of sight and sound.
- \* Don't work lambs for a week.
- \* Keep on same creep diet.
- \* Change diet gradually after a week.

## Handling Management

\* Handle sheep gently and use proper management of facilities and transportation to prevent stress, bruising, and/or injury during animal handling.

**Sheep behavior** - An understanding of sheep behavior will allow the appropriate design of facilities and equipment and result in improved ease of handling.

**Wide angle vision** - Sheep have a range of vision that allows them to see behind themselves without turning their heads. They depend heavily on their vision.

**Flight zone** - All sheep have a flight zone that can be used to an advantage when moving them. When a person enters the sheep flight zone, the animal will tend to move away.

**Lighting** - The lighting of handling facilities is an important factor to consider. Sheep have a tendency to move toward light and are attracted to diffuse light.

**Noise** - Sheep are very sensitive to noise. Excessive noise and confusion will cause them to balk. Sheep should be

handled as quietly as is possible.

**Memory** - Sheep can remember bad experiences. Therefore, well-designed facilities and humane handling should be employed from the start. Handling problems will only increase with time if improper techniques are used.

**Training** - Lead animals, such as a halter-trained or a leader-trained (rewarded with food) sheep or goat, can be of great help because sheep have a strong tendency to follow the leader.

**Dogs** - Herding dogs can be useful when moving groups of sheep. However, they should work calmly and not be allowed to bite, bark, or chase unnecessarily.

**NOT ACCEPTABLE** - Sheep should not be moved by grabbing their wool and using it as a handle. This causes bruising and pain for the animals.

#### **REMEMBER:**

\* Sheep are flock animals and are likely to become highly agitated and stressed when they are separated from their flock mates. Many serious sheep handling accidents have been caused by isolated, frantic sheep.

\* Sheep are motivated to maintain visual contact with each other. Allow them to follow the leader and do not rush them.

\* Every possible effort should be made to ensure that the sheep are kept moving on their own without poking, prodding or shouting.

\* If animals bunch up, handlers should concentrate on moving the leaders instead of pushing a group of animals from the rear.

#### **FINAL THOUGHTS:**

\* Proper handling management will reduce stress related to shipping fever and carcass damage resulting from bruising.

\* Understanding and working with sheep behavior is vital in the proper handling of sheep. This will result in a less stressful working situation, both for the sheep and their handlers.

### Transporting

\* The use of a reputable livestock trucker with experience hauling sheep is preferred.

\* Overcrowding should be avoided, especially for long-distance hauling.

\* A twelve-hour fast is recommended before loading sheep onto trucks or trailers.

\* Injured or sick animals should be transported separately.

\* Producers should be involved in the transportation process.

**Bottom Line** - It is the responsibility of livestock producers to consider the welfare of the animals in their care.

***Cruelty, abuse and neglect cannot be tolerated.***

### Environmental Conditions

\* The environment in which sheep live affects the quality of the products derived from them.

\* Proper design of housing and handling facilities for sheep simplifies their movement and protects their health.

\* Housing units must have adequate ventilation to prevent pneumonia.

\* Inspect and maintain facilities (fences, corrals, load-outs, etc.) regularly to ensure proper care and ease of handling.

### Biosecurity Issues

\* Limit visitors entering sheep facilities.

\* Isolate new livestock from resident animals for at least four weeks.

\* Monitor, regularly, livestock for signs of illness.

\* Require commercial livestock trucks to be cleaned prior to loading livestock, especially if the truck has hauled another producer's animals previously.