

Basic Sheep Husbandry

Terminology

- Lamb: up to 10 months of age
- Weaning: transitioning the lamb from milk to grass
- Hogget: older lambs once they reach their first winter
- Two-Tooth: lambs over 12 months of age which have one pair of permanent adult incisors
- Ewe: mature female, usually over two years
- Ram: mature male sheep
- Wether: castrated male sheep

Behaviour

Sheep are flock animals by nature and should always be kept in groups, as their strong social instinct allows them to form close bonds with flock members. Separation from other flock members can cause panic and stress.

Sheep reach puberty as early as seven months of age, and as late as 12. They can often become pregnant with twins or triplets.

Sheep are often more intelligent than they are given credit for. They respond well to training, especially from a young age and especially to some treat food. They can problem solve, learn their names and recent studies have shown they may be able to recognise familiar human (or sheep) faces for as long as two years.

Nutrition/Feeding

Sheep are grazing ruminants, which means they have four stomachs designed to digest high amounts of fibrous grass feed. Sheep graze with their teeth which enables them to eat lower to the ground; in comparison to cattle who graze with their tongue, so much prefer longer grass.

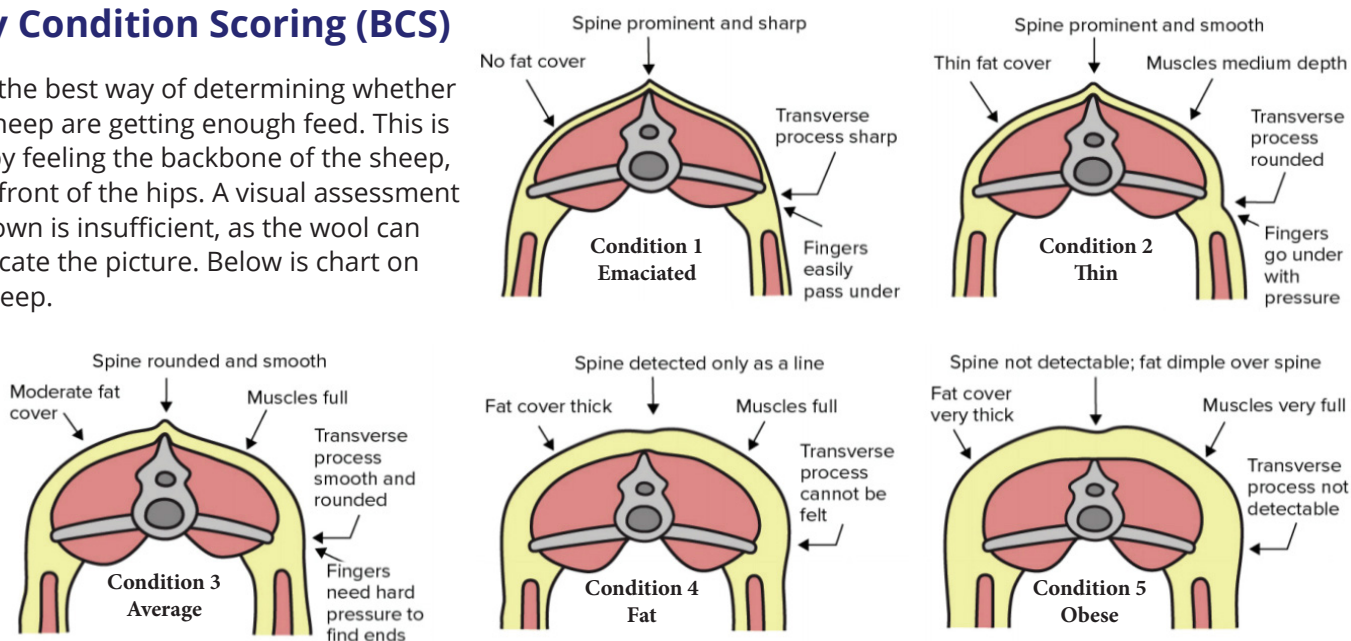
Ensuring you are feeding the correct amount of feed to your sheep can be a difficult task sometimes. The amount will vary throughout the year, as well as throughout stages of pregnancy for ewes and growth for lambs. Grass growth will of course vary with weather and therefore the seasons (highest in Spring and Autumn, lowest in Winter). Good choices for supplementary feeds include hay/baylage, sheep nuts or grain.

Ewes will need more feed throughout later pregnancy and when feeding lambs.

It is always important to know how many animals your paddocks can hold and feed. The Farmlands Lifestyle Guide is a useful tool in determining this.

Body Condition Scoring (BCS)

BCS is the best way of determining whether your sheep are getting enough feed. This is done by feeling the backbone of the sheep, just in front of the hips. A visual assessment on its own is insufficient, as the wool can complicate the picture. Below is chart on BCS sheep.



More information over page >

Drenching

Gastrointestinal parasitism (or gut worms) is a very common and important animal health problem. Often, they affect lambs more, as animals develop some immunity by 15 - 18 months of age. The risk periods are Autumn and Spring. If your sheep are not growing well, have diarrhoea or look generally unwell, then a drench may be warranted.

We recommend that younger animals are drenched every 4 - 6 weeks (28 days) from when they start eating grass (weaning) until they are past their second spring. For sheep a triple active drench is recommended, but there are other options that can be discussed with a vet, as well as creating a young stock drenching program.

A faecal worm egg count (FWEC) is an effective and easy way to check the worm burden in your animals and to determine whether a drench is needed. A fresh poo sample is all that is needed for the test.

For more information please refer to the separate "Gastrointestinal Parasitism in Lifestyle Ruminants" handout or give us a call.

Flystrike

Flystrike occurs when flies lay eggs on the skin of an animal, which hatch as larvae and ingest the skin and flesh below, causing pain, irritation and infection.

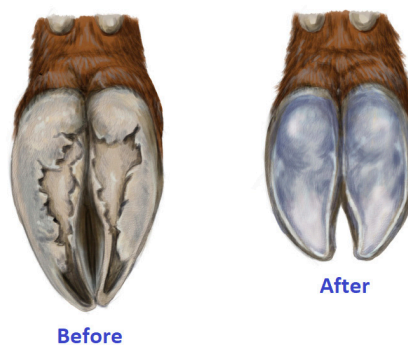
The risk period is in warm humid conditions (late Summer and Autumn). Sheep are good targets for flystrike as their wool is an attractant for flies, especially when it is dirty.

Preventative treatment is always the best option. Drenching your animals regularly can help reduce the incidence of flystrike by preventing sheep from developing dags (or dirty bums).

Talk to your vet about what the best option for your flock may be.

Foot trimming

Sheep, like humans need to have their nails trimmed every once in a while otherwise they may become overgrown and start to cause problems.



This is not a difficult task, we are more than happy to show you how to do this. Care must be taken to not cut them too short or cut the pad.

Give the clinic a ring to book in a hoof trim.

Vaccination

We routinely vaccinate sheep to protect them from a group of diseases known as Clostridial disease. These are a family of bacteria that live in the soil that can cause opportunistic disease if a lamb or sheep gets injured or sick.

Vaccinations consist of an initial shot followed by a booster four weeks later with an annual booster thereafter. All injections are given under the skin and can be done by you or a vet/vet tech if you prefer.

For ewes intended to produce lambs we recommend the annual booster around two weeks pre-lambing. This means that the ewe will be able to convey some protection in the colostrum for the lamb.

To order a vaccine please contact the clinic.

Summary / Key Points

- Drench youngstock!
Make a plan and stick to it.
- Vaccinate!
- Consider feed supply versus demand throughout the year and whether your property can handle the animals currently grazing there.

RANGIORA + 24 Hour Emergency Care: 181 Lehmans Road, Rangiora. Ph: 313 8387

KAIAPOI: Cnr Hilton & Williams Street, Kaiapoi. Ph: 327 8387

WOODEND + CATTERY: 138 Main North Road, Woodend. Ph: 312 8387

www.rangioravetcentre.co.nz

