

# Sheep Care and Management

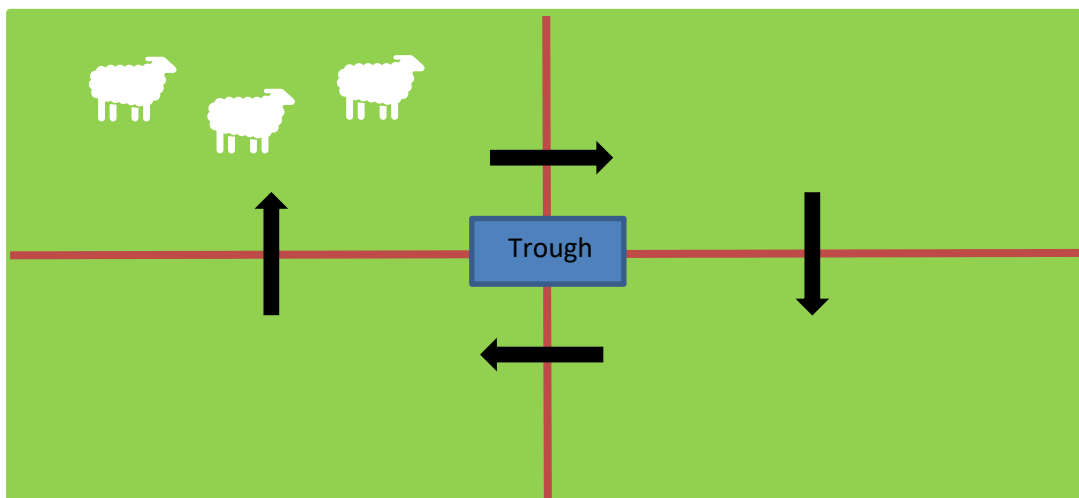


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## **Field Management**

Fields should be well fenced around the perimeter and any hedgerows should be checked for poisonous plants or holes that may allow escapees! There should also be access to a clean water trough and some form of shelter from the weather – if there are no trees it may be worth putting in a field shelter. As a rough estimate, we recommend a minimum grazing area of 0.5 acre per animal. However, this may vary depending on your ground and your pasture management. If you need any advice we are happy to help.

If possible, we recommend a rotational grazing system. This involves dividing your grazing into paddocks and moving the animals every few weeks. This will allow the paddocks to rest which will encourage grass growth especially during the spring and help prevent big worm burdens. A good system would be to create 4 paddocks, moving the sheep every 2 weeks. This allows each paddock a 6 week rest period.



## **Feeding**

For most of the year sheep will manage on just grass, however during the winter or at times when there is a high energy demand (lambing) they may need to be supplemented with additional feed sources. Sheep will always need a source of roughage so when the grass isn't growing in the winter they must be fed hay, silage or haylage. A sheep will need about 2kg of hay a day during the winter.






If a sheep has a poor body condition or additional energy demands, such as at tupping or lambing, they may need to be fed concentrates. These come in the form of a nut or mix and

are a blend of cereals, vitamins and minerals. Start at feeding 250g per sheep per day then increase this if needed. Speak to a vet if you would like some more detailed advice.

Problems can also be caused by a lack of vitamins and minerals in a sheep's diet. It is possible to test the soil of your field to see if it is deficient in anything or you can supplement your sheep's diet by using a mineral block in the field.

### **Body Condition Scoring**

We use body condition scoring to rate how thin or fat an animal is. We use a scale of 1-5. To body condition score, place your hand around the transverse processes of the sheep's spine. These are on the vertebrae after the last rib, in the lower back region. How defined or 'pointy' they are relates to how much fat is present.

<p>Score 1</p> 	<p>The vertical and horizontal processes are prominent and sharp. The fingers can be pushed easily below the transverse and each process can be felt. The loin is thin with no fat cover.</p>
<p>Score 2</p> 	<p>The vertical processes are prominent but smooth; individual processes being felt only as corrugations. The horizontal processes are smooth and rounded, but it is still possible to press fingers under. The loin muscle is a moderate depth but with little fat cover.</p>
<p>Score 3</p> 	<p>The vertical processes are smooth and rounded; the bone is only felt with pressure. The horizontal processes are also smooth and well covered; hard pressure is required with the fingers to find the ends. The loin muscle is full and with a moderate fat cover.</p>
<p>Score 4</p> 	<p>The vertical processes are only detectable as a line. The ends of the horizontal processes cannot be felt. The loin muscles are full and rounded, and have a thick covering of fat.</p>
<p>Score 5</p> 	<p>The vertical and transverse processes cannot be detected even with pressure; there is a dimple in the fat layers where the processes should be. The loin muscles are very full and covered with very thick fat.</p>

[https://beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/brp\\_1\\_Sheep\\_BCS\\_190713.pdf](https://beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/brp_1_Sheep_BCS_190713.pdf)

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This is a good way of monitoring how much extra feed your sheep may need or whether they need a bit of a diet! We recommend pet sheep having a BCS of 2.5 – 3.5. If you are planning on breeding your sheep please speak to a vet so we can advise on the best BCS for each stage of pregnancy.

### **Handling**

There are many cases where you may need to get close to your sheep to examine them or for veterinary attention. Therefore, it is a good idea to set up a handling system which will allow this. We recommend getting some metal hurdles or gates which can create a small pen around the sheep so they are easier to catch.



For some procedures we may need you to 'tip' the sheep which is sitting the sheep on its bottom. This is relatively easy to do and our vets are happy to teach you how to do this. It is very useful for checking sheep's feet.

### **Vaccination**

We recommend vaccinating your sheep against a group of bacterial diseases called Clostridial disease with a vaccine called **Heptavac**. Tetanus and botulism are part of this group. The initial course is 2 injections 4-6 weeks apart, then a yearly booster which will be 4-6 weeks before lambing if you are breeding your sheep.

There are other vaccines available but their usage will depend on which diseases you may be having trouble with in your flock. Please ask a vet for advice.

### **Foot trimming**

You should not need to routinely trim your sheep's feet. Trimming can cause lameness problems so we will only advise trimming if absolutely necessary.

### **Shearing**

Sheep are sheared once a year in late spring before the summer. If you do not know of a shearer please ask and we can put you in contact with some local farmers that can help you.

### **Worming**

Sheep can be affected by a large number of internal parasites. Clinical signs that your flock may be affected include weight loss and diarrhoea. We can detect these parasites by testing a poo sample either here at the practice or sending the sample away to a lab. We recommend bringing in a poo sample at least every 3 months, you can drop the sample into the practice and we will get it tested as soon as possible. Please make sure the sample is as fresh as possible and labelled. **Any samples dropped off after 12pm may not get tested on the same day.**

There are 5 different groups of chemical you can use to worm your sheep and they can come in the form of an oral drench, injection or pour on. We will advise you which product is best to use after testing your faecal sample.

Sheep should be moved to a clean pasture after worming to prevent them re-infecting themselves. Therefore a rotational grazing system is useful as you will have fields that will have been rested so there will be a lower worm burden on these pastures.

**Resistance** to wormers is now fairly common so we only aim to worm when needed and use the appropriate chemical for the job. We also recommend either leaving 10% of your flock untreated or leaving the flock on the dirty pasture for 24-48hrs after treatment. This will mean that any parasites transferred to the new field will not just be the ones resistant to the treatment.

**Coccidia** is a parasite found in the small intestine. It will only cause a problem in lambs or if it is in very high numbers in adult animals. Again we diagnose this from a faecal sample and will prescribe as oral treatment called **Baycox** if necessary.

It is also good to use a topical fly treatment during the spring and summer to prevent fly strike. Brands such as **Clik** and **Crovect** are commonly used.

### **Lambing**

If you are looking at breeding from your sheep, please speak to a vet and we can advise on how best to go about this! Lambing is great fun and very rewarding but it is easy to have problems if things aren't done quite right. We are always happy to offer advice and have a special lambing booklet we can send you. We also put on a lambing meeting in Jan/Feb time where we will go through all the basics with you.

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### **Other**

It's a good idea to keep a diary/calender or a book to help plan and record management and treatment of you sheep. For any medication, you should record:

- **Name of the animal treated**
- **Name of the product/drug**
- **Dosage**
- **Batch number and expiry date**

You can also use this book to keep a record of vaccinations and body condition scores.

If you are at all concerned about your animals please call us, we have a **vet available on the phone 24/7** to help you in an emergency or offer advice.

We are happy to teach you any skills you may need such as injecting and drenching, please just ask!

If you are planning on breeding **please let the practice know**. It is a very exciting time but also requires planning, preparation and equipment so it is best to chat with a vet and we can write a breeding programme for you.

**Hannah Martin MRCVS**

**Please contact us on:**

**Office 01844 260616**

**thame@norcalvets.co.uk**

### **Common conditions in sheep**

### Lameness

- Examine the foot as there are many causes of lameness
- Spray the foot with **blue engemycin spray**
- Antibiotics – **Tetroxy 1ml per 10kg**
- Anti-inflammatory/pain killer – **Meloxidyl/Loxicom 1ml per 20kg**

### Eye Problems

- Antibiotics – **Tetroxy 1ml per 10kg**
- Anti-inflammatory/pain killer – **Meloxidyl/Loxicom 1ml per 20kg**
- Topical treatment – **Opticlox eye ointment 1-2 times a day**

### Fly strike

- Clip wool around the area
- Clean with hibi scrub and remove as many maggots as possible
- Spray with **blue engemycin spray**
- Antibiotics – **Betamox LA 1ml per 10kg**
- Anti-inflammatory/pain killer – **Meloxidyl/Loxicom 1ml per 20kg**

### Dog Attacks/Wounds

- Call a vet!
- Shock is the main problem here – try and keep the sheep as stress free as possible in a calm environment
- Heavy bleeding – put pressure on any areas that are bleeding heavily until the vet arrives

### Arthritis

- Older sheep may suffer from arthritis which can be managed with pain killers
- **Meloxidyl/Loxicom 1ml per 20kg** or **Oral Metacam** or **Oral Bute**