

# ALBERTA SHEEP

## Shearing Your Sheep

### When to Shear

Sheep should be shorn at least once a year to help maintain flock health, and to produce higher quality wool. There isn't a set time of the year when you should shear; however, there are a few guidelines that may be helpful in determining the best time for your flock.

1. Producers often have their sheep shorn approximately one month before lambing. Be careful not to wait until the ewes are too heavily pregnant, as this will be stressful for the ewes and awkward for the shearer. Shearing before ewes lamb decreases the chances that lambs will ingest manure by mouthing soiled fleece while searching for the teats. The lamb(s) will also have an easier time finding the teats for the first time if the fleece is short. Shearing before lambing will help keep fleeces cleaner.
2. When planning for shearing keep in mind possible weather conditions and available housing facilities.
  - During cold weather shorn ewes create more heat units and less humidity than woolly ewes in the barn. The lamb(s) will get more warmth when lying next to a ewe that does not have a full fleece.
  - In warm seasons shearing can reduce heat stress.
  - Cold during the winter and sunburn during the summer can make life unpleasant for freshly shorn sheep.
3. Shearing while the ewes and lambs are together may cause injury to the lambs and havoc on the shearing floor.

### Preparing for Shearing

The most important step in preparing for shearing is to book the date with the shearer at least three or four months in advance. There is a shortage of professional shearers, and their services are generally booked early for the busiest times of the year. Leaving booking until the last minute may mean that the shearer will be unavailable. This could seriously disrupt your management schedule and postpone shearing until an inopportune time. It is also important to know your wool markets. Talk to your wool buyer prior to shearing so that you know what needs to be done in order to get the best price possible for your wool.

1. Shear in an area that the sheep are familiar with and normally enter.
2. The shearing area should have:
  - adequate ventilation
  - draft free working area
  - good lighting



- ready access to a hydro outlet
  - small catch pen close to shearer
  - 4 X 8 sheet of plywood to shear on
  - skirting table for wool (slatted or grated table to allow second cuts and vegetable matter to fall through when skirting fleeces)
  - clean work area (free of straw and other potential wool contaminants)
3. You should have available:
- adequate number of knowledgeable helpers
  - disinfectant approved for use on livestock for any nicks and scrapes
  - provisions for coffee breaks and meals
4. Ensure sheep are rounded up and dry for shearing day. Remember that depending on the time of year it can be difficult to keep sheep dry, especially during the winter months. If they are wet, you will have to postpone shearing.
5. It is a good practice to take sheep off feed and water the night before shearing. The sheep and shearer experience less stress and discomfort when sheep are tipped for shearing without a belly full of lambs, feed and/or water.
6. Try to separate your animals into groups to minimize the spread of diseases by shearing healthy animals and/or those less likely to be infected first. This may include shearing young animals before older animals. If infected animals are detected during shearing, ensure the clippers are disinfected prior to shearing other sheep.
- Sort sheep by breed (fleece type) before shearing to make sorting and packing easier while shearing. Always shear coloured sheep last and pack fleeces separately

## **Shearing**

Shearing sheep is hard work so take good care of your shearer. Provide extra help to keep catch pen full for shearer and for wool handling. It is best to have experienced helpers who know how to move sheep up without undue stress and who can handle wool on the shearing floor without getting in the shearers way.

- Ask the shearer to throw bellies and topknots to the side so they can be taken away separate from the fleece.
- Keep shearing floor clean.
- Do not shear when fleeces are wet or damp.
- Shear coloured sheep last and pack separately to avoid contaminating the white wool with coloured fibres.

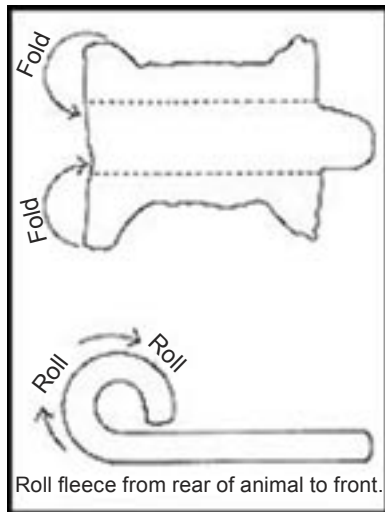
## **Fleece Preparation**

- All belly wool and topknots need to be packed separate from the fleece.
- All short, stained wool and tags should be removed from the crutch area as the sheep is being shorn. This wool is kept completely separate from all other types of wool and packed separately.
- The board should be swept and kept clean between sheep as well as during the shearing of the sheep when possible.
- All fleeces should to be thrown flesh side down onto a slatted wool table for skirting. Heavily contaminated wool and shorts should be skirted from the fleece and packed separately.

Avoid excessive skirting. All fleeces should be shaken to remove any second cuts before rolling and pressing the fleeces.

### Rolling the Fleece (all wools)

1. Fold fleece into thirds.
2. Roll fleece from rear of animal to front.
3. Roll fleece flesh side out.



- The fleeces should be tramped firmly in the wool bags. Depending on the breed of sheep, one bag will hold approximately 25 fleeces or over 200 pounds. There will be less wool sacks needed as well as fewer bags of wool to handle when bags are packed well. Tight packing also permits maximum loading of shipping cars and facilitates handling after it leaves the farm.
- Pack all the different breeds (styles) of wool separately. Try not to mix different wool types. Mark bags with producer name, contents and bag number. At the end of shearing the different wool types can be put into one bag but they need to be separated by sheets of newspaper and the bags clearly marked.
- Sew up all bags with cotton/butcher twine only.
- Storing the packed wool is an important consideration if it is not to be shipped to market immediately. Stored wool must be kept dry and protected from insects to prevent loss from damages.

Prepared by Lianne Read with funding from the Diversified Livestock Fund of Alberta