

Preparing for Shearing

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(Modified by OSMA 2010)

Sheep should be shorn at least once a year, to help maintain healthy skin, and to minimize external parasites, wool blindness, and fly strike. Shearing day can be a hectic time in the shepherd's calendar, but with some careful planning the day should run smoothly.

When to shear:

There is not 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:

- Producers often have their sheep shorn approximately a 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 a month before lambing helps keep the fleece clean during lambing. This 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. Some producers may wish to crutch ewes prior to lambing rather than having them completely shorn.
- Shearing can reduce heat stress and humidity in the barn.
- Bear in mind weather conditions and housing facilities when planning shearing. Cold during the winter and sunburn during the summer can make life unpleasant for freshly shorn sheep.
- Shearing while the ewes and lambs are together may cause injury to the lambs and havoc on the shearing floor.
- Shearing ewes just after lambs are weaned or during periods of nutritional stress, may make shearing difficult. Talk to your shearer to see if he/she has a preference regarding shearing at this time.
- Avoid foot trimming for a few weeks prior to shearing as sharp hooves can cause serious injury to the shearer.
- Be sure withdrawal dates have been met for any pour-on medications used on the sheep. The shearer probably doesn't need to be dewormed and the chemicals may contaminate the wool.
- It may not always be possible, but try to avoid performing stressful handling practices, such as needling, deworming, etc, near to the time you are going to shear. The sheep will remember that the last time they were handled was stressful and/or painful, and may become agitated.



Photo By: Eadie Steele

Preparing for Shearing:

Preparation for shearing should begin at least 3 or 4 months in advance. There is a shortage of professional shearers in Ontario, 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.

Take care of the wool while it is still on the sheep by avoiding throwing hay and straw over the backs of sheep, and by removing any plastic twine from feeds and pens.

Contact the Canadian Co-operative Woolgrowers for an updated list of shearers in Ontario.

With shearing day booked and fast approaching, begin to get the shearing area ready:

- Shear in an area that the sheep are familiar with and normally enter
- The shearing area should have:

- Adequate ventilation
 - Good lighting
 - Ready access to a hydro outlet
 - Small catch area if shearing shed not available
- You should have available:
 - Lots of eager help
 - Clean work area
 - Disinfectant approved for use on livestock for any nicks and scraps
 - Plywood; 4 X 8 to shear on
 - Rolling table for wool (slatted table or grated table to allow second cuts and vegetable matter to fall through when skirting fleeces)
 - Provisions for coffee breaks and meals
 - Have the sheep inside and dry on the day before the shearer arrives. You will probably have to postpone shearing, if they are wet.
 - Consider holding sheep off feed the night before. This is especially true if they are on an energy rich feed, such as lush grass or grain, as this may cause bloating and discomfort when sheep are tipped for shearing. Holding sheep off feed over night may also help keep the fleeces clean. Sheep should be allowed access to water.
 - Try to separate your animals into groups to minimize the spread of diseases such as Caseous lymphadenitis 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

The Right Way to Roll a Fleece

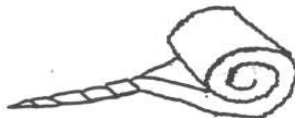
1. After clipping, lay out the fleece on a clean surface, flesh side down. Pick off any extraneous matter, such as straw or twigs, and also remove heavy, earthy bellies and daggs that may have been missed when trimming. Fold in the flanks towards the centre (as shown by dotted lines)



2. Turn in britch end and roll the fleece firmly and neatly towards the neck.



3. Draw out the wool at the neck end and twist slightly to form a rope or band of sufficient length to wrap round the rolled fleece. Do not twine this band too tightly or the wool may be damaged.



4. Pull the band tightly around the rolled fleece and tuck in the loose end. Make sure the fleece is firmly secured or it will soon become unrolled.



other sheep.