



Health and Safety Recommendations for Fasting of Sheep Prior to Shearing

The Full Facts

Fasting of sheep prior to shearing benefits both farmers and shearers. Sheep that are adequately emptied out cause fewer back injuries, strains and ACC claims, as well as reduced disease risk for those working in wool sheds, and reduce the incidence of pen stain in wool, resulting in improved product performance.

This document aims to make practical recommendations to reduce the incidence of full sheep being presented for shearing while ensuring that the welfare and performance of sheep is not adversely affected.

- Time off feed includes the time sheep spend mobbed up during mustering, when feed intake is minimal.
- Care must be taken to ensure that no sheep shorn exceeds the recommended number of hours without feed or water. This is particularly important when a full day's shearing is mustered the previous day, as sheep shorn late in the day will be off feed 10 – 12 hours longer than those shorn early in the morning.
- Extra care must be taken when handling pregnant sheep.

TEAM EFFORT

- Good communication, careful planning and the fostering of strong working relationships are the key ingredients that will make these recommendations effective. Both farmer and shearing contractor must recognise the variable conditions each party faces and recognise the importance of good planning and communication.

YARDING

- Sheep should be held in yards or a genuinely bare holding paddock (pasture cover no greater than 600 kg DM/ha when measured with an electronic pasture probe, or no more than 10mm in height if measured manually) before being put in the woolshed. It may be necessary to graze the paddock with other stock before using it to empty out sheep. Prompting ewes to stand and move about at regular intervals during yarding may hasten emptying out.

SHEDDING UP

- Sheep should be put in the woolshed as late as is practical on the day before shearing begins. Catching pens should be clean and dry at the beginning of shearing — this may require catching pens remaining empty overnight.
- Care must be taken when handling ewes and hoggets with lambs at foot. Where practical, lambs should remain with their mothers until the ewes/hoggets are put in the woolshed.

HEALTH AND WELFARE

- Exceeding the recommended maximums off feed or water may induce metabolic problems and/or precipitate clinical diseases. Farmers are advised not to vaccinate empty sheep against *Salmonella* or *Campylobacter*.

The complete *Health and Safety Recommendations for Fasting of Sheep Prior to Shearing* is available at: www.tectra.co.nz, www.shearing.co.nz, www.fedfarm.org.nz, www.osh.dol.govt.nz, www.acc.co.nz

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPTYING OUT SHEEP PRIOR TO SHEARING

Recommended Minimum and Maximum Number of Hours Without Feed and Water Prior to Shearing for Any Individual Sheep*

	Hours Without Feed		Hours Without Water		Special considerations
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	
Ewes (and adult male sheep)					
Non-pregnant, non-lactating	18	32	12	24	Exceeding these maximums may induce metabolic problems and/or precipitate clinical diseases.
Early to mid-pregnancy	18	30	12	24	
Late pregnancy and lactation	12	24	8	20	Exceeding these maximums may induce metabolic problems and/or precipitate clinical diseases. Where practical, unweaned lambs should remain with their mothers until ewes enter the woolshed.
Hoggets					
Non-pregnant, non-lactating	18	30	12	24	Use special care when handling pregnant hoggets. Exceeding these maximums may induce metabolic problems and/or precipitate clinical diseases. Where practical, unweaned lambs should remain with their mothers until hoggets enter the woolshed.
Pregnancy and lactation	12	24	8	20	
Lambs					
Pre-weaning	6	24	6	20	Exceeding these maximums may precipitate clinical diseases.
Weaned	12	24	8	20	

*These timeframes comply with the *Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Sheep* which is due for review in 2005/2006.

