







Raising the welfare standards for sheep

	Requirement	Why is it important	SPCA Certified Standard	Code of Welfare - Minimum Standards
 SHEEP HEALTH	Food and water	High quality and sufficient food and water help sheep to maintain good health. It is important that the food, and the way it is fed, minimise the risk of nutritional disorders such as bloat, acidosis, and mineral and vitamin deficiencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pasture must be able to meet the nutritional requirements of sheep at all stages of life and production, or additional feed must be provided.• Trace element supplementation is in place and monitored.• Free access to clean, fresh water at all times.• Water quality testing required at least every three years and for new water sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sufficient quantities of food provided to maintain good health, meet physiological needs, and minimise nutritional disorders.• Trace element supplementation not required.• Access to water must meet daily needs and water must not be harmful to health.• No water quality testing required.
	Lamb feeding	<p>Lambs need adequate amounts of colostrum to ensure they have the best start in life as it supports their immune system and helps to protect them from becoming sick.</p> <p>They should receive sufficient liquid feed in multiple feeds per day to allow them to grow, be healthy, and to meet their behavioural need to suckle. Lambs that receive insufficient milk will be hungry and will not grow well. Lambs that are fed their daily allowance in fewer, large meals may get sick.</p> <p>Lambs are motivated to suckle and not being able to do so often enough can be frustrating to lambs and can lead to abnormal oral behaviours such as gnawing on housing materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Colostrum given as soon as possible after birth.• Hand-reared lambs are given 150-250mL per kilo of bodyweight of colostrum or milk for the first week after birth, fed in at least three feeds a day.• Thereafter, lambs must be fed milk at 15 % of their bodyweight in at least three feeds a day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sufficient colostrum to ensure welfare.• Suitable liquid feed until rumen can utilise pasture/other solids.• No specific requirements on volume of feed or number of daily feeds.
	Lameness	Lame sheep experience discomfort and/or pain when putting pressure on their feet/legs. Early detection and quick treatment of the underlying problem will help to reduce pain and improve welfare outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A plan must be in place to manage the incidence of lameness at flock level to below 5 %.• Lameness must be treated as soon as possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No requirements for addressing lameness.
	Pain relief	Some husbandry procedures undertaken in sheep, such as castration and tail docking, can cause significant anxiety, fear, discomfort, and pain. Minimising pain and associated stress will result in better welfare outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appropriate pain relief required for painful procedures, regardless of the animal’s age.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Required for some, but not all procedures.• Not required for all ages.
 ENVIRONMENT	Pasture access	Pasture access allows sheep to engage in normal behaviours, such as grazing, and gives them some choice over what food to eat and where to rest, and provides them with the opportunity to access shade and shelter, promoting positive mental experiences and welfare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sheep must not be housed permanently unless in exceptional circumstances (e.g. severe weather) to protect animal welfare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No limit on time off paddock.• No grazing/pasture access required.
	Shade and shelter	Provision of shade and shelter ensures that animals can decide whether to stand in the sun, wind or rain, or out of it to avoid discomfort and heat and cold stress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to shade and shelter at all times.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to shelter to reduce the risk to health and welfare caused by exposure to cold and provide means to minimise the effects of heat stress. No specific mention of shade provision.
	Shearing	<p>Shearing makes sheep more comfortable. It also reduces the risk of parasite infestations that can cause serious issues such as fly strike.</p> <p>In winter, freshly shorn sheep are vulnerable as they have lost the insulation from their fleece. They will need more food and shelter to keep warm and comfortable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sheep must be shorn at least once a year or more often to prevent welfare issues.• Winter shearing must be approved by SPCA Certified and a management plan must be in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No minimum required.• No specific requirements for winter shearing.
 BEHAVIOUR	Enrichment	<p>Enrichment makes an animal’s environment more interesting, encouraging them to explore and engage in normal behaviours to meet their mental and physical needs.</p> <p>Enrichment for housed lambs include straw bales to promote climbing, investigation, and exploration. They also need sufficient space for running, jumping, and playing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lambs housed indoors or in pens must be provided with suitable enrichment and sufficient space to promote normal behaviours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enrichment not required.
	Handling	Regular handling of animals in a manner that is calm, gentle and that takes the animals’ behaviour into consideration will reduce fear, anxiety, and stress. Positive human-animal interactions also make it easier to handle and move animals. Appropriate human-animal interactions may even be enriching for animals and can create positive mental experiences (for both animals and humans!).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low-stress handling and husbandry techniques when handling and moving sheep.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Handled in a manner to minimise risk of pain, injury, or distress. Use minimum force when moving sheep.
	Weaning lambs	<p>Keeping lambs with their mothers until natural weaning helps encourage the social bond between the two, creating positive mental experiences. SPCA therefore recommends keeping lambs with their mothers until natural weaning occurs.</p> <p>Lambs that are removed from their mothers early will experience weaning as stressful. It should therefore be done gradually, using low-stress methods such as fence line weaning, which allows contact between lamb and ewe through a fence after weaning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lambs must not be weaned before they are three months of age and unless the survival of the ewe or lamb is at risk, must be kept with their mothers until weaning.• Low-stress weaning techniques must be used.• Hand-reared lambs must be weaned gradually over at least 7-10 days.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hand-reared lambs to be given suitable liquid feed until rumen can utilise pasture/other solids as sole feed source.• No specific requirements for weaning.
 CONSUMER ASSURANCES	Animal welfare audits	Announced, and particularly unannounced audits, ensure transparency, integrity, and credibility of standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Independently audited by an external company, annually and at least one unannounced audit/year. Additionally, SPCA Certified visit every single farm when they join the programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Animal welfare audits not required.
	Free from sub-therapeutic antibiotics	Using antibiotics where there is no diagnosed disease, condition, or microorganism (bacteria etc) - can lead to antibiotic resistance and means that healthy animals are unnecessarily treated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of prescribed therapeutic antibiotics for the treatment of a specific, diagnosed condition, disease, or injury only.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Medication can only be used in accordance with registration conditions and manufacturer’s instructions or professional advice. No specific mention of antibiotics.