



Sheep

SPCA Certified Standards



SPCA Certified Standards for Sheep

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SPCA Certified Standards for Sheep

Overview of SPCA Certified

SPCA Certified is a certification system designed to celebrate good farming and raise animal welfare above current legal requirements. Its overarching goal is to improve the lives of as many animals as possible, through a process of increasing uptake and continual improvement over time. As such, SPCA Certified standards for sheep allow participants to demonstrate that they apply a high level of animal welfare to their farming operations.

Certification is given to participants, which may include farmers, distributors, retailers and companies, through a legal contract, following a successful initial assessment and subsequent welfare audit of compliance with the SPCA Certified standards.

SPCA Certified standards for sheep apply to systems where the animals live outdoors all year round, with a degree of autonomy over diet selection, water consumption and access to shelter and shade. They apply to finishing operations, but not to dairy sheep, which are covered by their own, separate standard.

IMPORTANT: SPCA does not permit any sheep farmed under this standard to be subject to live export for slaughter.

In terms of the welfare outcomes they achieve, SPCA Certified standards are intended to go beyond the Animal Welfare Act 1999 and relevant Codes of Welfare. They are informed by animal behaviour and welfare science, consultation with stakeholders and the values of SPCA. All farm staff, operators and owners should be aware of, and compliant with the standards, as well as the legal requirements relating to the animals in their care.

SPCA Certified standards are intended to be used alongside existing industry programmes and practices on farm, and should be read in association with the following documents:

- Animal Welfare Act 1999.
- Animal Welfare (Sheep and Beef Cattle) Code of Welfare 2018.
- Animal Welfare (Painful Husbandry Procedures) Code of Welfare 2018.
- Animal Welfare (Transport within New Zealand) Code of Welfare 2018.
- Animal Welfare (Commercial Slaughter) Code of Welfare 2018.

Framework of SPCA Certified Standards

Previous iterations of SPCA Standards (Blue Tick) were based on the 'Five Freedoms' framework, which focuses on freedom from negative states, e.g. hunger, fear and injury, in order to achieve good welfare. However, with the recognition that animals can experience positive, as well as negative emotions, and the acknowledgement of sentience¹ in the amended Animal Welfare Act 1999, the time has come for a new approach.

As a result, the framework for these SPCA Certified standards has been derived from the Five Domains model of animal welfare, developed by New Zealand Professor David Mellor². The Five Domains model goes beyond minimising suffering, to actively promoting positive animal welfare.

The Five Domains are:

Good nutrition, good environment, good health, and appropriate behaviour, all of which contribute to the provision of opportunities for positive mental experiences.



Scope

SPCA Certified standards for sheep apply from the moment that an animal arrives, or is born, on the farm, until the time that it leaves the farm or is euthanased.

All transport, including transport to and from the farm, and all slaughter processes, are covered by the Animal Welfare Act 1999 and relevant Codes of Welfare. It is the responsibility of the member (farmer/licensee³) to ensure that transport operators, contractors and slaughterhouses comply with the law and ideally follow best practice recommendations.

¹ Sentience is the ability to feel, perceive or experience things subjectively (i.e. from one's own perspective), rather than objectively (i.e. from an external perspective).

² Mellor, DJ (2016) Moving beyond the "Five Freedoms" by updating the "Five Provisions" and introducing aligned "Animal Welfare Aims". *Animals: an open access journal from MDPI* 6(10):59.

³ See the SPCA Certified Farmed Animals Operation Manual for more information.

Traceability and Integrity

SPCA Certified endeavours to inspire best practice animal welfare within the sheep industry and to ensure transparency in animal welfare. To protect the integrity of SPCA Certified and the participating farmers, distributors, retailers and companies who use the brand, it is important that all SPCA Certified members clearly demonstrate product traceability throughout their supply chains.

SPCA Certified also uses independent audits, including unannounced audits, to maintain the integrity of the scheme and ensure that participants are meeting its standards. As a result, products carrying the SPCA Certified logo allow consumers to identify products that have come from sheep farmed to a higher standard of animal welfare than is currently required by law.

For more information about SPCA Certified, including types of membership, procedures and the third-party auditing process, please refer to the SPCA Certified Farmed Animals Operations Manual.

SPCA Certified Standards for Sheep

Important notes:

- Section titles and their accompanying descriptions are taken from the Five Domains.
- Unless stated otherwise, all standards referring to adult sheep apply equally to lambs.
- Information presented in ***bold italic*** type is either a standard explanation, a recommendation, an area of concern, or an indication of where a standard is likely to be reviewed in the future.
- In order to avoid unnecessary duplication, existing information/records from other sources can be used to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of a standard. Electronic records are acceptable, as long as they can be accessed by SPCA Certified during assessments/audits.

Note on working dogs

The requirements of the Code of Welfare for Dogs (2018) apply to working dogs and must be followed at all times. Farmers using dogs to manage stock must ensure that they are properly fed and watered, well exercised, kept in good overall condition and provided with suitable accommodation that is kept clean and habitable.

If working dogs are observed to be in poor condition or housing is deemed to be unacceptable, this will be noted during the assessment/audit and followed up by SPCA Certified. Failure to remedy the situation may lead to removal from the programme.

Positive Mental Experience



Provide safe, congenial and species-appropriate opportunities to have pleasurable experiences

The sheep icon  indicates a standard that provides a positive mental experience for sheep.

Good Nutrition



Provide ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour

Feed

- N1 Pasture must be capable of providing for the nutritional requirements of sheep at all stages of life and production. Where pasture is of low quality or quantity, additional forage or feed (including appropriate mineral supplementation) is required.
- N2 Management practices must be in place to ensure there is enough pasture/feed to allow regular, frequent, rotation grazing if the weather is very wet or the pasture becomes trampled and muddy.
- N3 Where there is to be any change in feed, the new diet must be introduced gradually and the sheep monitored for any adverse changes.
- N4 Where additional feed is required; it should be provided in a manner that avoids unnecessary competition for access between animals.
- N5 Where feed is stored; practices must be in place to ensure that it does not become contaminated or unsuitable for sheep to eat.
- N6 A trace element supplementation programme, with appropriate monitoring, must be in place. Records must be available for inspection on request.
- N7 A written plan to adequately manage feed supply is required for periods when there may be limited feed, such as drought, extreme winter conditions or dry summers, and during different physiological stages of the life cycle, e.g. at lambing.
- N8 Sheep body condition must be managed between BCS 3 – 4 (on a scale of 1 – 5). Where the body condition score of any adult animal drops below 3, immediate corrective action must be taken.
- N9 Body condition scoring must be conducted regularly for all breeding sheep and at least twice yearly for the entire flock. Special attention must be paid to ewes prior to lambing and all body condition scoring must be recorded.

Recommended times for body condition scoring are at weaning, 4 – 6 weeks prior to mating and at pregnancy scanning (approximately 60 – 90 days prior to lambing).

It is recommended that the farm establishes a good working relationship with a specialist in sheep nutrition.

Augmenting the soil is the recommended method to address mineral deficiencies, when identified in sheep.

***For a useful guide to body condition scoring sheep, visit:
<https://beeflambnz.com/knowledge-hub/PDF/ewe-body-condition-scoring>***

Water

- N10 All sheep must have uncompetitive access, at all times, to a freely available supply of clean, fresh drinking water.
- For the purpose of this standard, neither snow nor damp pasture, is accepted as a suitable water source.
- N11 The number and size of troughs and drinkers, and their water flow rate, must be sufficient to allow all sheep to access water during peak drinking times.
- N12 Troughs and drinkers must be provided at a height that allows sheep and lambs to drink using a normal, comfortable drinking posture.
- N13 Lambs must be able to access water easily, without the risk of falling into troughs.
- N14 Where electric fences are used; they must be placed so as not to discourage sheep from easily accessing troughs or drinkers.
- N15 The area surrounding troughs and drinkers must be actively managed to ensure that it does not become flooded or excessively muddy.
- N16 Troughs and drinkers must be cleaned, as required, in order to maintain clean, palatable water.
- N17 Water at the trough level must be tested at least every three years, to ensure it is potable and has an acceptable mineral content. Water quality records must be kept, including the alternative measures used, if/when problems are discovered.
- For the avoidance of doubt, each separate water source servicing troughs must be tested.
- N18 Each new water source must be tested before sheep are given access to it, in order to ensure that it is:
- potable; and
 - that mineral and microbial contamination levels are acceptable.
- N19 In the event of a major incident in the surrounding area, e.g. an earthquake or flood, the water supply must be tested within two months (if it is safe to do so), for potability and contamination.
- N20 An alternative source of potable water to the primary source must be available in the event of an emergency and recorded on the emergency preparedness plan (see standard E34).

Lambs

With the exception of standards N25, N29 and N30, which apply to all lambs, the following section concerns lambs which are removed from the ewe shortly after birth. SPCA Certified strongly recommends that lambs are kept with their mothers until natural weaning occurs.

- N21 Colostrum or colostrum substitute must be given as soon as possible after birth and ideally within the first four hours of life.
- N22 Ewe's colostrum, milk, or milk replacer, must be offered at a rate of 150 – 250 mL per kilo of bodyweight during the first week after birth, divided into at least three feeds per day, while taking care to watch for signs of bloat/scours.
- N23 After the first week of life, lambs must be offered ewe's milk, or milk replacer, equivalent to 15 % of their body weight, divided into at least three feeds per day.
- N24 Milk from ewes receiving medication, e.g. antibiotics, must not be fed to lambs.
- N25 A management plan must be in place for the fostering and artificial rearing of lambs.
- N26 Fostering of lambs must occur as soon as compromised individuals are identified and ideally within 48 hours of birth.
- N27 If lambs are to be tube fed in order to ensure their survival, this must be carried out by a competent person or under the supervision of a competent person.
- N28 All equipment used to feed lambs must be kept clean and be regularly disinfected.
- N29 Lambs must be given access to fibrous feed or pellets from three days of age.
- N30 Lambs requiring penning, who are less than a few days old or have an unhealed navel, must have their navel sprayed to prevent infection.

Feeding ewe's colostrum beyond 24 hours of birth is strongly recommended and can help long term growth and improved gut development.

Feeding smaller meals every few hours is recommended over fewer, larger meals.

Good Environment



Provide shade/shelter or suitable housing, good air quality and comfortable resting areas

Site plans

- E1 A detailed site plan must be kept on farm, showing:
- the layout of all buildings and pasture areas;
 - all natural and/or artificial shelter and shade provisions;
 - access roads and laneways; and
 - waste disposal areas (offal and rubbish).

The site plan must also include the dimensions and names/numbers of all areas where sheep are kept and handled.

Fencing

- E2 All fencing must be designed, constructed, and actively maintained, to minimise the risk of injury to the animals and to ensure that they are securely contained.
- E3 The use of electrified barbed wire fencing is prohibited.
- E4 Where electric fences are in operation; an electric fence tester must be used to measure voltage levels running through the fence line. Any faults detected must be promptly rectified.
- E5 All fencing and gates used to contain sheep must be inspected each time sheep enter and leave an area, in order to ensure that it complies with standard E2 above and is not harmful to the animal's welfare.

Future versions of this standard will not permit the use of barbed wire fences. It is recommended that non-barbed alternatives are chosen whenever existing fences are due to be replaced.

Shade and shelter

- E6 All sheep must have access to shade and shelter at all times, in order to let them manage their temperature and avoid the impact of extreme weather, both hot and cold. 🌳
- E7 A mitigation plan must be in place to minimise the effects of thermal stress on sheep and lambs.

- E8 Sheep must be checked every day during extreme weather (both hot and cold), to ensure that the shade and shelter provided is appropriate. If it is not, remedial action must be taken.
- E9 Around the time of lambing, both ewes and newborn lambs must be given special protection from adverse climatic conditions and observed regularly. This may include the use of lambing paddocks or artificial shelters.
- E10 If ewes are lambing outdoors, special attention must be paid to the shelter provided, in order to protect the welfare of any lambs arising from multiple births. Hay bales, in a cross formation, can help to reduce heat loss in newborn lambs.

Free access to shade and shelter is important for animals to manage their temperature and overall wellbeing. It can also provide comfort, health and productivity benefits. 🌿

For most grazing livestock in New Zealand, when the air temperature rises above 25°C, welfare and productivity begins to decline as animals use energy to stay cool.

During winter, it is recommended that a small number of sheep are scored for cleanliness on a regular basis, to ensure that their lying areas are comfortable and dry. If dirty animals are seen, the reasons for this need to be investigated and remedied.

Shade and shelter can include natural and artificial structures, including windbreaks, treed areas, shade sails, lean-to structures and shelterbelts.

Housing

- E11 If sheep or lambs are housed for any reason, including artificial rearing, this must be documented. Details must include:
- the date of being housed;
 - the duration of housing;
 - the number of animals being housed;
 - the date of entry/return to the paddock (or movement off-farm/euthanased); and
 - the reason for housing.

SPCA Certified does not support the housing of sheep, however, there may be exceptional circumstances where it is necessary to do so for short periods of time, e.g. when dealing with pre-weaned lambs without their mothers, injured sheep or during severe weather, where the conditions are beyond the animal's normal ability to cope.

Transport

- E12 Before loading, sheep must be assessed, in order to ensure that they are fit for transport and able to withstand the entire journey without suffering pain or distress. The assessment must take into consideration:
- the condition of the animal;
 - its body condition;
 - its age;

- the duration of the trip; and
- the likely weather/temperature conditions.

If there is any question about whether an animal is fit for transport or not, a registered veterinarian must be consulted.

E13 All sheep must be free from signs of injury or disease, including pink eye. Any wounds or skin lesions identified must be fully healed and free from discharge.

No sheep must be transported if it:

- is severely lame or unable to bear weight on all four legs;
- is suffering from poor body condition (BCS 2 or less);
- is in the last third of pregnancy;
- shows signs of respiratory distress; or is, for any other reason;
- unfit for transport.

Sheep that are unfit for transport must be given immediate veterinary care or euthanased without delay.

Where animals have undergone a painful husbandry procedure, e.g. castration, they must not be transported for at least three weeks after the procedure.

E14 Holding and loading facilities must be designed to facilitate ease of movement and reduce handling stress for sheep and stockpeople. 🟡

E15 Sheep must not be stood-off on concrete for extended periods prior to loading. 🟡

E16 On arrival into yards, sheep must be allowed time (approximately 20 minutes) to settle before further drafting or moving. 🟡

E17 Sheep must be kept off green-feed for a minimum of four hours and maximum of eight hours before transport.

During this period, access to roughage should be made available.

E18 Sheep must be provided with free access to clean water until immediately before loading. Water must be given in a way that avoids unnecessary competition between animals.

E19 Holding yards must provide enough shade and shelter to cover all animals contained. Where signs of thermal stress (hot or cold) are evident, during either lairage or transport, immediate remedial action must be taken.

There must be enough space to allow all animals to be able to stand up, lie down and remain in their original social groups.

E20 Unfamiliar animals must not be mixed.

E21 Stationary periods during loading, transportation or before unloading must be minimised, as heat and humidity build-up during this time is a major contributor to heat stress in sheep.

E22 Areas of high use, e.g. ramps, must have surfaces that are non-slip, easily cleaned and regularly maintained.

- E23 Bumpers or buffer pads must be provided between the loading ramp and vehicle to prevent bruising and injuries from movement during transport.
- E24 Where adjustable or portable ramps are used, they must be able to firmly attach to prevent ramp movement during loading and unloading.
- E25 All transport vehicles and equipment must be appropriately designed and have non-slip surfaces.
- E26 The angle of the ramp must not exceed 20 degrees for sheep.
- E27 Sheep must be allowed to load at their regular walking speed, without unnecessary force or noise.
- E28 Transport of sheep must not exceed eight hours, starting from when the first animal is loaded into the transport vehicle and ending when the last animal is unloaded.
- E29 Transport must be avoided during conditions where severe thermal stress (hot or cold) could occur. Where transport during these periods cannot be avoided, stocking densities on the vehicle must be adjusted to mitigate the risk.
- E30 Where the closest slaughterhouse is not used to minimise transport time, a reason for the decision must be recorded.
- E31 The timing of moving sheep into the yards for transport to slaughter must be planned between the farmer, transporter and slaughterhouse, in order to minimise waiting times.
- E32 Accurate transport records must be kept on farm and must include:
- the name and address of all transit destinations and slaughterhouses;
 - the name of the transport company used for each journey;
 - the number of, and approximate age of, the sheep being transported for each journey;
 - the time the sheep last had access to water and green feed;
 - the time the sheep arrived into the yards and when they were loaded onto the vehicle;
 - a signed declaration stating that the animals were fit for transport;
 - the number of animals found unfit for transport and the reason why; and
 - the time the vehicle left the farm.
- Note:** Some of this information may be obtained from the Animal Status Declaration (ASD) form, which must accompany animal transfers.
- E33 Transport operators must have contingency plans in place, to ensure the welfare of the sheep in their care, in the case of an emergency, e.g. vehicle delay, mechanical breakdown, major accident/weather event.

Transport is a highly stressful experience for most animals, including sheep. Careful planning is therefore required before transport, in order to minimise the risk of distress and injury.

It is recommended that all stockpersons involved in the sheep transportation process have formal training in animal handling.

Emergency preparedness

E34 An emergency preparedness (contingency) plan must be created and all staff must be familiar with it.

The plan must detail how the health and welfare of the sheep will be ensured in an emergency, e.g. drought, flood, fire, storm and biosecurity breach, and what everyone's roles and responsibilities are.

The emergency preparedness plan must be reviewed annually and updated where changes in management practices have occurred or where a new emergency has been encountered and resolved.

All emergencies and corrective actions taken must be recorded.

Good Health



Prevent or rapidly diagnose and treat disease and injury, and foster good muscle tone, posture and cardiorespiratory function

Animal Health Plan

H1 An animal health plan must be created and maintained in conjunction with a registered veterinarian. The plan must include:

- a preventative disease and parasite management plan, e.g. flystrike and worm egg counts;
- monitoring of mineral status;
- monitoring for and managing lameness/foot health, acidosis, ill-thrift and staggers, along with other common diseases/disorders; and
- issues associated with parturition and reproduction, e.g. dystocia, prolapses, pregnancy toxemia and milk fever, as well as lamb health concerns, e.g. bloat, scouring and pneumonia.

In addition, animal movement records and farm of origin, births and deaths (including multiple births and euthanasia) must be recorded.

The health details of all incoming sheep must be checked and recorded.

In the case of any diagnosed or notifiable disease being confirmed on farm, this must be reported to SPCA Certified and the relevant authorities, as soon as practicable.

All farm records regarding animal health and welfare, as well as any associated corrective actions taken, must be kept for a minimum of three years.

- H2 The animal health plan must be updated after any major incidents, e.g. a disease outbreak, or following significant changes to the production system.
- H3 Each farm must have a euthanasia plan that describes the euthanasia process in detail, including the equipment used and the staff who are permitted to conduct the procedure.
- H4 Any animals identified with health or welfare concerns must be treated appropriately and monitored at least twice a day.

Prevention of injury and disease is the best method for maintaining sheep health and welfare. The use of medications should be minimised and only used for prophylactic purposes.

The establishment of a good working relationship with an experienced large animal veterinarian is highly recommended.

The animal health plan referred to in this document may come from various sources, e.g. farm diary, and is not intended to duplicate already existing information.

Ram management

- H5 Rams must be in good body condition prior to mating.
- H6 Rams must be checked by a veterinarian no more than eight weeks prior to mating, in order to ensure that they are fit and in good health.
- H7 Rams must be monitored regularly for signs of lameness at the time of mating. Where lameness has occurred, rams must be removed for treatment and not used for mating.

Rams removed for lameness or ill health must be recorded on the animal health plan.

Breeding

- H8 All breeding on farm must take into account consideration of traits intended to improve animal welfare, including resistance to facial eczema, worms and dag susceptibility. Where possible, selection should also aim to improve foot and udder health.
- H9 The impacts of the breeding programme must be monitored and recorded, in order to address any unforeseen issues. Where animal welfare problems are encountered, the breeding programme must be revised accordingly.
- H10 Breeds of pedigree sheep that require high levels of intervention at parturition are prohibited. The use of horned breeds is also prohibited.
- H11 Hoggets selected for mating must be well-grown, fed to allow for continued growth as well as pregnancy, and carefully observed around parturition.
- H12 Only natural breeding and laparoscopic artificial insemination are permitted.

It is strongly recommended to use breeds that do not require tail docking.

Pharmaceutical use

H13 Staff involved in the administration of pharmaceuticals must be trained and competent to do so.

All equipment used must be calibrated and tested regularly, e.g. weigh scales and drench guns.

H14 Therapeutic antibiotics must only be used where they have been prescribed by a registered veterinarian for the treatment of a specific, diagnosed condition, disease or injury.

H15 Pharmaceuticals must be in-date, licensed for use in New Zealand and only stored and administered as per the manufacturer's guidelines on the label.

Pharmaceuticals may only be used 'off-label' with prior veterinary approval. Such approval must follow the relevant Ministry for Primary Industries guidelines⁴ and be accompanied by a signed and dated declaration from the veterinarian that 'off-label' use was justified.

H16 All pharmaceutical treatments must be safely discarded after their expiration date.

H17 Up-to-date records must be kept of all treatments administered to sheep, including:

- pharmaceutical name, administration method and dose rate;
- reason for administration and the result of treatment;
- date(s) administered;
- withholding period; and
- animal identification (if available).

The animal health plan should include protocols addressing the usage, storage and monitoring of antibiotic treatments and a strategy for the reduction of their use. Protocols should be in line with the recommendations of the New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA) policy on judicious use of antimicrobials.

Establishing an antimicrobial stewardship plan on farm is highly recommended.

Surgical husbandry procedures

H18 Surgical husbandry procedures must only be performed by a registered veterinarian, or by trained and competent staff who have been approved by a registered veterinarian and only then in accordance with the relevant regulations.

H19 Staff undertaking any surgical husbandry procedure must be trained to recognise early signs of distress, injury or ill-health in the animal(s) being handled.

H20 Surgical husbandry procedures must not be performed on animals less than 24 hours old and the procedures must only be conducted where animals can be expected to make a full recovery, without experiencing unnecessary pain or distress.

⁴ <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/processing/agricultural-compounds-and-vet-medicines/acvm-guidance-for-veterinarians/#using-products-off-label>

- H21 Animals must be humanely restrained and appropriately sedated, if necessary, so that they do not injure themselves or others while surgical husbandry procedures are being performed.
- H22 All equipment used for surgical husbandry procedures must be clean, well-maintained, in full working order and appropriate for the procedure being undertaken.
- H23 Animals must be given appropriate pain relief for surgical husbandry procedures, as indicated by veterinary advice.
- H24 Records must be kept of all surgical procedures carried out. Records must include:
- the name of the procedure performed;
 - the date performed;
 - the animal ID (if available);
 - the initials of the person performing the procedure; and
 - the reason why the procedure was medically necessary.
- H25 Once the procedure is completed, animals must be visually assessed at least twice during the 24 hours' post-surgery and remedial action taken if problems occur.

It is recommended to seek advice from your veterinarian concerning current pain relief available for painful husbandry practices in sheep.

Horn removal

- H26 Horned breeds must not be used.
- H27 In the case that a horned sheep is produced, it must be disbudded, rather than dehorned. The procedure must be approved, in writing, by SPCA and must be conducted under the direct supervision of a registered veterinarian. Pre and post-operative pain relief must be provided.

Castration

- H28 Lambs destined for slaughter before six months of age, or prior to sexual maturity, must not be castrated.
- H29 Castration, where conducted, must be performed between 24 hours and four weeks of age, once a secure maternal bond has been established between the ewe and the lamb. Within that time period, castration should be performed as early as possible and practical.
- H30 Pre- and post-pain relief for castration must be used, regardless of lamb age.
- H31 Standard castration rings and shortening of the scrotum are the only accepted forms of castration. Surgical castration is prohibited.

Tail docking

- H32 Tail docking must only be performed following prior discussion with, and approval by, SPCA Certified.
- H33 Tail docking of lambs must be performed before they are six weeks of age and must be done using either a hot iron or rubber ring specifically designed for the purpose.
- H34 Regardless of the animal's age, wherever tail docking is undertaken, appropriate pain relief must be used.
- H35 Following docking, the remaining tail stump must be sufficient to cover the vulva in females and of a similar length in males.

Shearing (including dagging and crutching)

- H36 Sheep must be shorn at least once per year and as frequently as necessary to mitigate animal health and welfare concerns.
- H37 Shearing must be carried out by trained, competent staff, who are skilled in performing these techniques on sheep.
- H38 The time off feed, prior to shearing, must not exceed twenty-four hours (less for pregnant ewes).
- H39 Water must not be withheld for more than twelve hours prior to shearing. Any exception to this must be agreed to by SPCA Certified in writing.
- H40 Any cuts or wounds resulting from shearing must be treated immediately.
- H41 Sheep must be provided with good quality feed, free access to water and effective shelter, immediately after shearing.

In addition, where there is a risk of cold, wet weather, sheep must be provided with additional feed and appropriate shelter for at least four weeks after shearing, in order to mitigate the loss of insulation from the shorn fleece.

- H42 Sheep must not be shorn when extremely cold or wet weather conditions have been predicted.
- H43 Winter shearing must only be carried out following prior discussion with, and approval by, SPCA Certified.

In addition, a written management plan must be in place to ensure the health and welfare of sheep shorn under these circumstances, e.g. provision of good quality feed and effective shelter, plus the use of a winter or cover comb.

- H44 Shearing must not be conducted within the last six weeks of pregnancy.

SPCA Certified does not recommend shearing in late pregnancy, due to the negative impacts of fasting on the increased metabolic requirements of heavily pregnant ewes and their greater susceptibility to adverse weather conditions. Mid-pregnancy shearing is permitted, however, as this can increase lamb survival and ewe welfare.

Flystrike

H45 Strategies must be in place to prevent or minimise the prevalence of flystrike, including, but not limited to:

- Frequent inspection of sheep to identify early strike cases.
- Application of insecticide throughout the risk period, alongside regular monitoring.
- Shearing, dagging or crutching before the risk period.
- Control of pasture to prevent dag formation.
- Control of internal parasites.

Management strategies, including the judicious use of insecticides, with a focus on prevention rather than treatment, is paramount to the mitigation of flystrike.

Lameness

H46 A plan must be in place to manage lameness at the flock level below 5 %.

H47 Where sheep require treatment for lameness, this must be done as soon as possible, in order to avoid unnecessary suffering. Foot trimming to treat or prevent footrot is not permitted.

Foot scoring of sheep to identify problems and individuals requiring treatment, as well as to better target foot health interventions, is strongly recommended. Special attention should be paid to any sheep with 'sore feet', especially in relation to the possibility of footrot.

The use of a footbath to treat Interdigital Dermatitis (ID) and other surface level infections is recommended, along with regular monitoring of foot condition, to check for dry or cracked hooves as a result of treatment.

Inspection of animals

H48 Sheep must be inspected regularly, in order to ensure they do not show signs of lameness, injury, disease, distress, abnormal behaviour, loss of body condition or other issues of concern.

Where an animal shows any signs of the above, it must be appropriately treated and monitored more frequently than normal. Veterinary advice must be sought if the problem is serious or persists and if treatment is not possible, the animal must be humanely euthanased without delay.

H49 Staff conducting flock inspections must be trained and competent to perform such

inspections in a careful and respectful manner, which allows them to observe the sheep without the risk of the animals becoming distressed. 🐏

H50 Inspections must increase to at least daily where ewes are within four days of their expected lambing date and during the first week post-lambing.

Pre-lambing inspections should be carried out from a distance and with a minimum of disturbance, in order to avoid causing unnecessary distress to the ewe.

H51 Where multiple births are likely, susceptible ewes must be identified at pregnancy scanning and prioritised for inspection leading up to lambing and through weaning.

H52 Multiple bearing ewes must be separated and brought closer to the farm to allow for rapid intervention if needed.

H53 Animal inspections must occur at least daily during severe environmental conditions, or where welfare issues have been identified. Such inspections must continue until conditions have returned to normal.

Animal identification

H54 Animal identification procedures must be performed by a registered veterinarian, or by trained and competent staff, using equipment that is clean, well-maintained, in full working order and appropriate for the task.

H55 The following methods of animal identification are acceptable:

- ear tagging with metal or plastic tags;
- Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) ear tagging; or
- Electronic Identification (EID) ear tagging.

Ear marking or notching is not an acceptable form of permanent identification.

H56 Temporary identification methods, e.g. paints, dyes and wax markers, may be used to identify animals, providing that they are specially formulated for use on animals.

H57 Only one tag (metal or plastic) may be applied to each ear. The exception is where an RFID or EID tag is used in addition to a conventional metal or plastic tag, in which case, two tags per ear is permitted. Ear tags should be of a size that does not risk injury to the eye, when the ear is flicked.

H58 Where the ear is pierced, tagging equipment must be disinfected between sheep, in order to reduce the spread of infection.

H59 Sheep must be restrained with care and in a manner that does not result in injury to themselves, other animals or operators.

Euthanasia and mortality

H60 All cases of death and euthanasia must be investigated and recorded in the animal health plan.

For death, the details recorded must include:

- the animal's identification (if available);
- the time and date when the animal was discovered; and
- the cause of death (where known).

For euthanasia, the details recorded must include:

- the animal's identification (if available);
- the reason for, and method of, euthanasia used;
- the time and date when the animal was discovered, when euthanasia was performed and when the animal was confirmed dead;
- the veterinarian's advice regarding euthanasia (if this was needed);
- the staff involved and their role in the process; and
- the method used to restrain animal (if restraint was required).

Where practical, steps must be taken to prevent the issue from occurring again.

H61 If there is any question as to whether euthanasia is required, a registered veterinarian must be contacted immediately to advise whether treatment is possible.

If the veterinarian cannot provide advice in a timely fashion, e.g. within 2 – 4 hours of the question arising, then the animal must be euthanased, in order to avoid unnecessary suffering.

H62 Euthanasia must only be performed by trained staff or a registered veterinarian. Staff responsible for conducting euthanasia must be appropriately trained, competent for the role and named in the animal health plan.

H63 All equipment used for euthanasia, must be maintained in correct working order and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

H64 All sheep must be handled, restrained and euthanased in a manner that does not cause additional unnecessary pain, fear or distress to them.

Where there is not a risk to human safety, animals must be euthanased where they are found and must not be dragged, pulled, lifted or otherwise moved while still alive.

H65 Acceptable methods of euthanasia must ensure a rapid and humane death. They include:

- captive bolt, followed within fifteen seconds, by pithing or bleeding out; or
- gunshot to the head, followed within fifteen seconds, by bleeding out.

Note: The choice of method used will vary depending on factors such as animal age and sex. For the avoidance of doubt, blunt force trauma is not an acceptable method for killing sheep or lambs.

H66 Sheep must be immediately rendered insensible and must remain this way until death occurs.

The signs of an effective stun include:

- immediate animal collapse;
- a lack of normal, rhythmic breathing or vocalisation;
- a lack of corneal reflex (no blinking when the eye is touched);
- no attempt to lift the head; and
- no attempt to regain an upright position.

If an animal shows any sign of regaining consciousness, it must be immediately re-stunned and the effectiveness of the re-stun confirmed.

H67 Where captive bolt guns are used, they must be positioned correctly for stunning to be effective and the operator must assess the effectiveness of the stun before bleeding out or pithing occurs.

Where firearms are used, the muzzle of the weapon must never be held against the animal's head and the operator must be confident of causing death on the first shot.

H68 Staff conducting the euthanasia process must remain with the animal until death is confirmed.

The signs of death in sheep include:

- a complete lack of the corneal reflex;
- a complete lack of breathing for five minutes;
- a complete lack of heartbeat for five minutes;
- fixed and dilated pupils;
- no response when the nose is firmly pinched; and
- a change in the colour of the mucous membranes, from pink to grey.

H69 The carcasses of all euthanased animals and any animals found dead, must be disposed of in accordance with the relevant local Council regulations and in a manner that does not put other animals or people at risk of disease.

Carcasses must be protected from pests and from being disturbed by other animals.

Nothing outlined in this section is intended to discourage the prompt diagnosis and treatment of any sick or injured sheep.

When used, euthanasia must ensure a rapid, humane death. It must be undertaken where:

- ***there is likely to be an unacceptable delay in treating an animal's source of suffering;***
- ***the animal is failing to respond to treatment;***
- ***the source of suffering is unknown, untreatable or severe; or***
- ***where transporting the animal for any reason would aggravate the condition or cause unnecessary pain or distress.***

It is recommended that a minimum of two members of farm staff are trained and competent in appropriate euthanasia techniques.

Biosecurity

H70 Where additional sheep or lambs are brought on to the farm, they must be quarantined before being introduced into the existing flock. In addition, for lamb finishing operations, the following requirements must be met:

- Lambs must be older than 6 months of age when they arrive on the farm.
- They must not be ear marked or ear notched.
- They must be health checked and drenched while in quarantine.
- They must not show signs of surgical castration.
- If tail docked, the tail stump must be sufficient to cover the vulva in females and of a similar length in males. SPCA Certified must be informed if docked lambs are brought onto the farm and undocked lambs should be selected over docked lambs.
- There should be no evidence of disbudding and polled breeds should be selected wherever possible.

H71 A detailed biosecurity plan must be created and available to view on the farm. Staff must be familiar with and able to access this information. As a minimum, the plan must address the following requirements:

- the identification of all farm visitors, e.g. through a sign in book;
- the provision of Personal Protective Equipment for staff and visitors;
- sanitary facilities, including hand washing facilities, a foot bath with disinfectant and a dedicated scrubbing brush for boot cleaning;
- the provision of a designated area for the entry of incoming stock, visitors, trucks and equipment, which is separate from the area where sheep are kept;
- the pest control procedures in place and location of relevant equipment; and
- the cleaning, sanitation, waste and carcass removal procedures.

H72 All pest control programmes must be humanely managed. Preferable methods of pest control include:

- physical exclusion methods;
- removal of elements in the vicinity that may encourage rodents and other pest species; and
- ensuring facilities are maintained in a clean and tidy condition, to reduce the risk of rodent and pest animal movement.

Where lethal control is used, the extent of the pest problem must be assessed at least annually, in order to ensure that lethal control is still warranted, and that it meets the requirements of the relevant regulatory authority.

Appropriate Behaviour



Provide sufficient space, proper facilities, congenial company and appropriately varied conditions

Sourcing of sheep

B1 Sheep must be kept in stable, social groups throughout their lives. ●

It is the preference of SPCA Certified that sheep produced under this standard are only moved off the farm for slaughter. In other words, that they are born, raised and live out their productive lives on the same SPCA Certified property wherever possible.

Weaning

B2 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. ●

B3 Lambs must be weaned gradually over at least 7-10 days.

B4 Lambs must be gradually introduced to high quality pasture and other substitutes.

B5 Lambs must be weaned into an area with shade and shelter that gives them protection from environmental conditions and which has not been recently grazed by other sheep.

If lambs show any signs of thermal stress, immediate corrective action must be taken.

B6 Where removal of the lamb from the ewe occurs outside of natural weaning, low-stress weaning techniques must be used, e.g. creep weaning and fence line weaning.

Handling and moving sheep

B7 All sheep operations must have access to equipment and/or facilities for the safe handling, restraint, treatment, segregation, loading and unloading of sheep. This includes the use of non-slip flooring in animal areas. ●

Facilities must be constructed and maintained to minimise the risk of illness, injury or distress to sheep. This includes ensuring that features such as gates, latches and swinging chains do not make excessive noise when used.

B8 Low-stress handling and husbandry techniques must be used when handling and moving sheep. ●

Low stress animal handling procedures must be included in the animal health plan and made easily accessible to all personnel.

- B9 Sheep must be moved only as fast as the slowest animal in the flock. 🐏
- B10 On arrival at the yards or handling facilities, sheep must be allowed enough time (approximately 20 minutes) to settle after mustering, before further movement or husbandry procedures are undertaken.
- B11 Sheep must not be held on their sides or back for more than a few minutes at a time, especially if the rumen is full or if they are heavily pregnant.
- B12 Sheep must not be dragged, moved or lifted by their wool.
- B13 Mixing of sheep must be avoided and stable groups must not be separated unless absolutely necessary.
- B14 Dogs must be kept under control at all times and must not be permitted to cause physical injury to sheep.

Behavioural enrichment

- B15 If lambs are to be housed indoors or in pens, they must be provided with suitable environmental enrichment, e.g. hay or straw bales, and sufficient space to promote normal behaviours, such as jumping, climbing, and playing. 🐏

Provision of physical barriers, including hay or straw bales, encourages sheep to perform normal behaviours. 🐏

Additional foraging material, e.g. fodder, can provide behavioural enrichment by allowing sheep to perform natural manipulation and investigatory behaviours. The planting of trees, such as poplar and willow, to provide fodder is recommended. 🐏

Managers, stock-keepers, and other staff

- B16 Manager(s) must ensure that all staff directly involved with sheep have access to, are familiar with, and adhere to the relevant Codes of Welfare and the most recent version of this document.
- B17 The farm must have a written policy of what actions will be taken should an employee be found to have been negligent in their role and responsibilities, in relation to animal welfare.
- B18 If one does not already exist, a written policy that allows staff to report any concerns they have regarding sheep health and welfare must be developed.

Where concerns are raised, an immediate investigation must be conducted by the owner, in order to ensure problems are rectified without delay.

- B19 Formal animal welfare, health and husbandry training, e.g. technical training programmes and workshops, should be offered for up-skilling staff, where this is appropriate for the position. 🐏

Training records must be available to view on request.

- B20 Specific to their area of work and responsibilities, staff must be able to demonstrate a good working knowledge of the health and husbandry of sheep. This may include:
- recognising the signs of common diseases, understanding their prevention and control, and knowing when to seek management or veterinary support;
 - recognising the signs of pain and injury in sheep and lambs, and how to manage them appropriately;
 - having an understanding of low stress handling and loading techniques;
 - having an understanding of lameness assessment;
 - understanding and being able to body condition score sheep;
 - having knowledge of lambing, lambing issues and the care of new born lambs; and
 - having knowledge of painful husbandry procedures and appropriate methods used to reduce acute and chronic pain, and suffering.
- B21 Staff must be able to take action to seek professional help if they are unsure of, or are unfamiliar with, any behavioural or physical symptoms shown by sheep.
- B22 Staff who are undergoing training, must work in conjunction with fully trained, competent and experienced stock-keeper(s), until they are fully trained themselves. Members of staff or external workers must not carry out tasks that they have not been trained in or are not competent in performing.
- B23 Sheep must be cared for by a sufficient number of staff, in order to ensure that their needs are met in a compassionate manner. 🐾

The initial and continued training of staff working with sheep is important in promoting a high standard of animal welfare, as is the ability to demonstrate and practice positive and compassionate animal handling. 🐾

Where appropriate for the position, formal animal welfare training is recommended.

END OF STANDARDS

Appendix

Records required

Records	Standard	Description
Seasonal		
Body Condition Score	N9	Score at weaning, 4 – 6 weeks prior to mating and at scanning. Note areas of concern and remedial action taken.
Annual		
Animal health plan	H1	Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• disease and parasite plans;• mineral status;• animal health and welfare indicators;• animal movements on/off farm;• health status of incoming animals; and• any births/deaths not recorded elsewhere. Update following major incidents and retain records for three years.
Biosecurity plan	H71	Review and update as necessary.
Breeding plan	H9	Record impacts and revise as necessary.
Emergency preparedness plan	E34	Review and update as necessary.
Feed supply plan	N7	Review and update as necessary.
Pest control plan	H72	Review at least annually where lethal control options are used, otherwise keep for inspection if requested.
Trace element supplementation programme	N6	Review and update as necessary.

Every three years

Water quality	N17	Retain lab reports for inspection.
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Other

Animal welfare policy	B17	Policy in place.
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Euthanasia & mortality (every occurrence)	H3 & H60	Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• animal ID;• reason and method;• time and date;• time of death;• vet advice (if given);• staff involved; and• any restraint used. For mortality, record cause of death if known.
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Horn removal (every occurrence)	H27	Retain copy of SPCA approval for inspection if requested.
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Housing of sheep/ lambs (every occurrence)	E11	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Record:• date;• duration;• number of animals;• reason; and• date housing ended.
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Lamb fostering plan	N25	Review and update as necessary.
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Off-label drug use (every occurrence)	H15	Retain veterinary declaration for each off-label use.
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Pharmaceutical use (every occurrence)	H17	Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• drug name;• administration method;• dose;• reason for treatment;• date(s) of treatment;• result of treatment;• withholding period; and• animal ID.
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Site plan	E1	Must be available for inspection.
Staff training	B19	Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • name of staff member; • date and type of training; and • any qualification received. Retain training records for inspection.
Surgical procedures (every occurrence)	H24	Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • name of procedure; • date; • animal ID; • initials of operator; and • the reason for performing the procedure.
Tail docking (every occurrence)	H32	Retain copy of SPCA approval for inspection if requested.
Thermal stress mitigation plan	E7	Must be available for inspection.
Transport records (every occurrence)	E32	Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • name and address of destination/slaughterhouse; • name of transport company; • number and age of sheep; • time when food/water was withdrawn; • time of yarding and loading; • number of animals unfit for transport (and reason why); and • time of departure. Also include a signed 'Fitness for Transport' declaration.
Welfare reporting policy	B18	Policy in place.
Winter shearing (every occurrence)	H43	Retain SPCA approval for inspection if requested.



Contact

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