**Sheep Behaviour**

It is important for people working with sheep to understand their behaviour and the necessary precautions to take when working with sheep.

**Vision**

* Sheep depend heavily on their vision.
* Sheep have their eyes set on the side of their head, so have a wide peripheral field of monocular vision but have limited binocular vision in front of them.
* The area in the back of the sheep’s head is a blind spot when their head is raised.
* If a sheep is approached from the rear, a handler can remain undetected visually and have a better chance at catching the animal.
* Sheep have difficulty picking out small details such as an open space created by a partially opened gate.

**Bahaviour**

Sheep are best known for their strong flocking and “following” instincts. They will run from what frightens them and band together in large groups for protection.

Sheep are social animals, and will be highly agitated if separated from the rest of the flock. Ensuring sheep always have visual contact with other sheep will prevent stress when moving, handling, or housing them.

Sheep are docile, non-aggressive animals by nature but if they are frightened, they can hurt people.

* Rams may be very aggressive and have caused serious injuries to people. It is important to know where the ram is and never turn your back on him.
* Ewes may exhibit aggressive behaviour after lambing to protect their young.
* Head butting is a natural and learned behaviour in sheep and is highest during the rutting season which precedes the onset of heat in ewes.
* Avoid petting a ram’s head as they may see this as a challenge or aggressive behaviour. The ram sees the worker as part of the flock and want to dominate.
* Sheep are affected by movement from darker to lighter areas, from warm enclosures to outdoor pens and even by changes in climate.
* Frightened sheep are very hard to gather, move, or work with, because they become very unpredictable.
* Sheep have good memories; these memories need to be positive ones as much as possible.
* Changes in normal behaviour, such as separating from the flock, can be an early sign of illness.
* Lack of appetite is the most common symptom exhibited by a sick sheep.
* A sheep that is reluctant to get up or takes a long time to lay down, is probably in pain.

**Handling**

Sheep react to their surroundings, including the working environment and facilities.

The following guidelines will create a positive experience when handling sheep:

* Sheep like routine and are afraid of visual objects, so be patient when introducing something new.
* Allow sheep to set the pace, so they will stay calm.
* Sheep move best when they are not afraid, so work slowly and calmly.
* They react negatively to loud noises and yelling.
* Will bunch up in corners to protect themselves.
* Handle sheep gently - wool grabbing and rough handling will cause bruising.
* Sheep do not like to move into the darkness; place the chutes facing a well-lit area to encourage the direction of movement.
* They will move towards other sheep, and will move better through long, narrow pens and chutes.
* Sheep resist moving from one surface to another.
* Have no depth perception, so avoid shadows and sharp contrasts between light and dark.
* Always have an escape route when working with an animal in close quarters.

**Flight Zone**

Sheep have a flight zone which is a term for how close you can get to sheep before they start moving. Sheep move when you enter their flight zone. The closer you get, the faster they will move away. Likewise, if you want the sheep to stop moving, step out of their flight zone.

**Sitting up a sheep**

A sheep can be immobilized for safe handling by sitting it up on its rump on the ground. The best way to sit a sheep:

* Hold the sheep against your braced knees, with one hand under its chin and one on its rump.
* Turn the sheep’s head onto its shoulder with one hand while forcing the rump down against your leg with the other hand.
* When the sheep is no longer standing, lift the front leg and sit the sheep securely on its rump.

**Sheep Shearing**

Back injuries, sprains, strains and hand wounds are the most common injuries associated with handling and shearing sheep. These injuries can be avoided by:

* using the correct techniques when manually handling sheep
* regularly checking and maintaining shearing equipment
* taking thorough training prior to shearing sheep.

**Sheep Behaviour – DISCUSSION RECORD**

**Agenda:**

* Discuss the hazards with the sheep on your farm.
* Review control methods of handling sheep on your farm.
* Do you have a well-trained dog to help handle your flock?

Comments or safety concerns as a result of the discussion or observed since the last rally?

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Follow-up to concerns raised at previous rally?  
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Action Items?  
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Near Miss/Incidents/Unsafe Acts/Conditions to Report?

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Topics recommended for future Rallies: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank the rally members for their participation.**

**Quiz Answers:** 1. T, 2. T, 3. d, 4. T, 5. d

**TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

1. If a sheep is approached from the rear, a handler can remain undetected visually and have a better chance at catching the animal. True or False

2. Rams may be very aggressive and have caused serious injuries to people. It is important to know where the ram is and never turn your back on him.True or False

3. Which of the following are best practices when handling sheep:

1. Allow sheep to set pace, so they will stay calm
2. Handle sheep gently - wool grabbing and rough handling will cause bruising
3. Sheep will move towards other sheep, and move better through long, narrow pens/chutes
4. All of the Above

4. Sheep can be immobilized for safe handling by sitting it up on its rump on the ground.

True or False

5.Which are the most common injuries that occur while sheep shearing?

a. Back Injuries

b. Strains or Sprains

c. Hand Injuries

d. All of the above

**Attendance RECORD**

\*This is to acknowledge that I understand and agree to actively participate in the safety meeting.

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