



Housing and Working Facilities for Sheep

Introduction:

Sheep can acclimate to stiff weather conditions with no shelter if they have access to forage, water and protection from the wind. It is recommended that housing be available when lambing occurs during the winter months. Housing usually improves the number of live lambs per ewe. During the summer months, shelter is generally not required although some breeds will seek shade to be protected from the heat.

Housing facilities for sheep do not need to be elaborate or expensive. Old sheds and barns can be excellent housing and usually can be easily renovated to improve the management of the operation. There are many alternatives other than the typical barn for shelter such as calf hutches, fabric structures, and easy built inexpensive sheds. The most important features of any structure are that they provide easy management, enable wet and wind free conditions and good ventilation.

Space requirements:

Space requirements for sheep accommodations must be calculated to determine how many sheep can be housed in a given area. Feeder space, handling space (i.e. for shearing), as well as floor space for pens, should be considered in developing the design. One advantage of having multiple numbers of pens is being able to separate the nutritional needs of each group of sheep. Ewes and lambs should not be in the lambing pen for more than 5 days, therefore pens may be needed depending on the number of ewes. Generally, a maximum of six ewes per lambing pen is recommended. The number of ewes paired with single or multiple lambs should be considered so that they may be placed in separate pens with appropriate rations. The recommended pen space for various management groups in the flock is:

- Ewes for flushing - 10 to 14 sq. ft/head
- Ewes with lambs - 16 to 20 sq. ft/pair
- Weaned lambs (market lambs or replacements) - 8 to 10 sq. ft/head
- Lambing pens - 16 sq. ft/pen
- Rams (180-300 lb.) - 20-30 sq. ft/head
- Feeder Space - 9 to 20 inches/head depending on size, shorn or unshorn, breed, pregnancy and the number of times fed per day
- Creep feeder – 8 to 12 inches/opening/lamb

Reference: Sheep Housing Design Criteria (PSU 92), James W. Hilton, Penn State College of Agriculture Sciences and Cooperative Extension

Structures should provide:

- easy management
- shelter from inclement weather
- good ventilation

Sheep respond very poorly to crowded conditions. Provide enough space per sheep in a given area.

Considerations when planning:

When planning the design for housing following behavior instincts of sheep should be taken into consideration to enable safe handling and moving and limits needed labor. Some of these are:

- Sheep do not like to be enclosed in a tight environment.
- Sheep prefer to move from a darkened area towards a lighter area.
- Sheep prefer to move to flat areas.
- Sheep prefer to move in the facilities in a consistent direction.
- Sheep will stop forward movement when they see sheep moving in the opposite direction.
- Sheep will move faster through a long, narrow pen or area rather than through a square pen.
- Sheep will move more willingly toward an open area than toward what looks like a dead end.

Housing designs:

The Pennsylvania State College of Agricultural Sciences, Cooperative Extension has a full listing of plans for sheep housing and portable shelters, in addition to plans for fencing, feeders, and other management equipment. These plans are of a historical nature but they do offer useful designs and provide ideas for adopting existing barns and sheds to a sheep operation. It is useful to note the location of the feed racks and feed room, the creep feeding area and the lambing pens in a housing area. These particular locations will help lessen the labor needed to manage the flock. It is also important to contact the appropriate building inspector in the region to be sure that the structures being built meet the required building standards, safety codes and qualifies for all the necessary permits. Talking to an experienced builder or contractor can help ensure that the facility and equipment of the building is suitable for the cost, relevant to the size and intensity of the operation. Access to the web site for these plans is:

<http://www.abe.psu.edu/extension/ip/IP725-24.pdf>

Resources:

Alton, Ian and McCutcheon, Bill. 2002. Evaluating Farm Resources and Sheep Production System. Ontario Sheep Marketing Association

http://www.public.iastate.edu/~mwps_dis/mwps_web/sh_plans.html

<http://www.sheepandgoat.com/housing.html>

For more information visit www.umass.edu/cdl

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