WHAT SHEEP NEED EVERY DAY: CLEAN, WELL MAINTAINED SHELTER

Housing needs for sheep are affected by various factors:

• Climate
• Lambing season
• The way the flock is managed and raised.

The time of year, weather and where lambs will be born affects housing needs. If lambing occurs when the weather is cold and harsh, more elaborate housing is required to protect the newborns and ewes. If lambing occurs on a pasture when the weather is mild, then a simple shelter can provide adequate protection.

Sheep can be housed in many different types of shelters. Barns and metal buildings are used because they provide protection for sheep, their feed and equipment. Some sheep owners convert old dairy, pig or poultry barns for sheep. A hoop house, which has a metal frame and fabric cover similar to a greenhouse, can also be used.

The location of sheep housing should be on an elevated site that has proper drainage. It should be protected from wind.

Bedding is used to provide warmth, insulation and comfort. The bedding must work with the type of sheep being raised and it must be clean and dry. There are different types of materials that can be used for bedding for sheep, each with their own advantages and disadvantages:

• Straw or hay – the most common
• Sawdust – not suitable for wooled sheep
• Wood shavings or chips – less absorbent
• Sand – can improve comfort
• Peat or hemp
• Leaves.

Some sheep owners try to keep their sheep outside all the time. They believe that their fleeces stay cleaner and the sheep get better ventilation and more exercise. Sheep can graze through about 30 cm of snow. However, they still need a fresh supply of clean water. Careful monitoring of their food supply must also ensure that they have enough to eat.

Sheep need clean bedding, clean living spaces and access to clean water.
What does the Code of Practice say about housing for sheep?

Buildings that house sheep should:

- Be well ventilated, to avoid humidity, condensations, harmful ammonia levels, and cold draughts – baby lambs can catch pneumonia if they become chilled
- Be well lit, with either natural or artificial lighting and with light and dark periods of at least 6 hours in each 24-hour day
- Be built to make it easy to remove manure, clean and disinfect the facility
- Be designed to make it easy to deal with emergencies such as fire, flood, electrical, or mechanical breakdown
- Have well-drained areas for rest and rumination.

Shelter and sheep facilities:

- Sheep require shelter from the extremes of weather. This may be as simple as a shelterbelt tree plantation, or a windbreak.
- Where a building is used to supply shelter, it should be designed and maintained to provide clean, well ventilated and sanitary conditions.
- Adequate ventilation should be provided when animals are housed indoors to reduce the risk of pneumonia and the chilling of lambs. Effective ventilation will avoid high humidity, condensation, damaging ammonia levels and cold draughts.
- Where natural lighting is not used, artificial lighting should be used. Light and dark periods should be at least 6 hours each 24-hour day.
- Sheep should have access to a well-drained area for rest and rumination. This area must be large enough to accommodate all the sheep at the same time

Sheep pens intended for longer-term use should:

- Have enough space for all the animals to lie comfortable on a dry or bedded area and enough room for animals to move around easily at will
- Provide shelter from wind and hot sun when necessary
- Be built of materials that are strong enough to contain the sheep securely
- Be designed and maintained to prevent sheep from becoming trapped or injuring themselves
- Be made with materials, including paint and wood that do not contain any chemicals known to be harmful to sheep or known to contaminate meat and milk products.

Floors for sheep pens:

- Should provide safe, secure footing and be effectively drained
- Can be made of flooring materials such as soil, gravel, concrete, wood, metal or plastic
- Should have absorbent bedding material such as straw, wood shavings, or peat moss to make interior pens clean and comfortable – fresh bedding material must be added to keep the surface as dry as possible
- If they are slotted, should be designed for the kind of sheep that will use them, providing secure footing and be comfortable — space between slots must avoid foot injury and yet allow manure to pass through the slots.

The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Sheep will be updated and completed by the summer of 2013. Information on the progress of this new Code can be found on the National Farm Animal Care Council website at www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/sheep.

Priorities for the updated Code include flooring materials for housing.
A CHECKLIST FOR SHEEP BUILDINGS AND PENS

The following list of general guidelines provides one view of what a "good" building should consider.

Buildings should incorporate the following desirable characteristics:

- Good space to avoid crowding
- Protection from wind, rain, snow, heat
- Good roof and walls – possibly insulated
- Good ventilation (check with professionals)
- Draft-free
- Place to store medication for safe quick access
- Storage away from feeding and watering areas
- Good clean comfortable lambing area
- Adequate area for treating sick animals
- Easy to clean pens
- Good lighting when needed

Outside pens should provide:

- Good space to avoid crowding
- Good safe pens and yards
- Safe runs, chutes, etc.
- Good drainage in feeding and watering areas
- Easily maintained and cleaned bunks
- Type of bunks that animals cannot get into
- Some areas that are covered from bad weather

Sheep should ideally be grouped according to age, stage of lactation, etc., to accommodate their different requirements at various stages of growth and production.

The people who work with sheep flocks should also be considered when designing buildings and pens. They will do a much better job if they have good working spaces and conditions. Areas which are difficult to service may not be cleaned properly and can become a source of problems.

What does the Code of Practice say about space requirements?

### Guidelines for Housing Sheep

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ewes or Rams</th>
<th>Feeder Lambs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feed lot</td>
<td>m²/head</td>
<td>m²/head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard-surfaced</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open front shed floor area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant ewe</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewe and lamb</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ram</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry ewe</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceiling height (minimum)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slotted floors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slotted floor area</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% floor area slotted</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slot width (mm)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slat width (mm)</td>
<td>50-75</td>
<td>50-75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Space requirements for sheep are affected by their weight.
The Code of Practice for sheep also recommends minimum standards for the length and height of feeders for sheep.

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**Recommended Minimum Feed Space Allotments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feed space (length per animal)</th>
<th>Ewes and rams</th>
<th>Feeder lambs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hand feeding</td>
<td>400 mm</td>
<td>300 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self feeding</td>
<td>150 mm</td>
<td>100 mm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommended Maximum Heights for Bunk or Trough-Type Feeders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feed throat height</th>
<th>Ewes and rams</th>
<th>Feeder lambs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hand feeding</td>
<td>300 mm</td>
<td>250 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self feeding</td>
<td>375 mm</td>
<td>300 mm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpts from the *Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals - Sheep* (©1995) have been used with permission, Canadian Sheep Federation. www.cansheep.ca

The process for the development of updated Codes can be accessed through the National Farm Animal Care Council at www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice.