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Shearing Sheep

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service
SHEARING SHEEP

A perfect job of shearing consists of:

1. Cutting each fiber of wool once only, next to the skin.
2. Keeping the fleece all in one piece.
3. Minimizing straw and dirt in fleece.
4. Removing leg hair, tags and all dark wool from fleeces.
5. Handling the sheep carefully to avoid injury and scratches.
6. Making sure that the wool is dry when shorn.
7. Tying each fleece with paper twine.

To do a good job of shearing:

1. Make sure that equipment is in perfect running order. Cutters and combs must be sharp. Comb teeth must be worked down if they are sharp or rough.

2. Take a good stroke. Start with each tooth of the comb against the skin; cut each fiber of wool only once; end this stroke against the skin and back out.

3. Hold the sheep so that the sheep is resting and the skin is smooth in the area that is being shorn. Learn the Australian method of shearing.

4. Shear before the ewes go to pasture in the spring if possible.

Shear lambs that aren't fat and heavy enough to sell in July. When shearing in the summer, protect the sheep from sunburn and flies for a few days. Use a fly repellent, such as EQ335 or Smear 62.

Shear the heads of wool blind sheep and "crotch out" feeder lambs and ewes before the breeding season.

Shear the rams a month before the breeding season. It may be necessary to allow the ram to stand while being shorn in order to avoid over heating.
JUDGING SHEARING CONTESTS

Perfect Score----100 points

Time

The score for time: (1) Professionals, perfect - 1 1/2 minutes or under; 1/10 point deducted for each 3 seconds over 1 1/2 minutes; (2) 4-H, perfect - 4 minutes or under; 1/10 point deducted for each 5 seconds over 4 minutes.

--perfect score = 20 points

Absence of 2nd cuts in fleece

The wool fiber should be cut only once, next to the skin.

--perfect score = 20 points

Condition of the fleece

When scoring condition of fleece, consideration is given to position of sheep and the shifting from one position to another. This is important to prevent "breaking the fleece." Some of the other things watched for are: Keep the fleece in one piece; prevent splitting belly wool; keep from stepping on fleece; prevent unnecessary breaking of fleece with handpiece; make sure neck wool is opened along throat and push fleece aside for wool tier.

--perfect score = 20 points

Manner of Handling

How well will a shearer hold up under pressure for all day, all week or all season? That is the question the judge scoring "manner of handling" must decide.

His observations must be PROJECTED to cover the longer period in arriving at a score. A few sheep can be sheared rapidly regardless of the system, but to be a Top Shearer, the manner of handling must be correct. Use leverage and balance. Never lift the sheep. Shift it constantly so shearing is continuous. Keep sheep comfortable at all times and in a position which protects the fleece.

--perfect score = 15 points

Absence of cuts on sheep

Cuts on sheep (skin nicks) are not considered serious as long as they DO NOT impair the usefulness of the sheep. Permanent injury is serious. In some cases, the judge must use his own judgment as to the seriousness of the cut. However, as a general rule, 1/10 point is deducted for each skin nick. When blood is drawn on a teat on a ewe, 5 full points are deducted. On a ram or wether, the deductions are: 3 points for teat and 2 points for sheath when blood is drawn.

--perfect score = 15 points

Appearance

The sheep should appear smooth when shorn. Shear marks should be straight and as inconspicuous as possible. The head should be shorn very neatly. It may be permissible to not shear below the knees and hocks.

--perfect score = 10 points