



Sheep Safety



The temperament of a flock of sheep varies depending on breed, environment (pasture versus confinement), and previous handling experience. Because sheep are much smaller than mature cattle or pigs, it may be easy to become complacent when working with them. However, accidents can happen when working around any type of livestock. Understanding sheep goes a long way towards preventing injuries.

Safe approach

If coyote predation is a problem within your flock, you may see a change in the temperament of the flock. Sheep have little defence from predators other than fleeing. When approached in an enclosed area, it is common for sheep to run. If they have no escape route, they may run towards the handler. This reaction can be done with enough force to knock a person down.

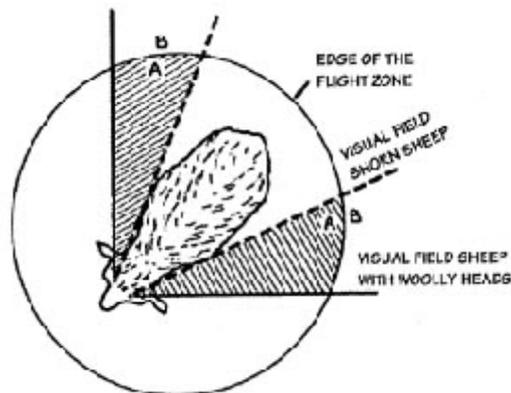
Sheep also have a blind spot that prevents them from seeing anything directly behind them. The size of the blind spot varies from 191 to 320 degrees, depending on the amount of wool on the head. Approaching from the blind area can also spook the animal when the handler “suddenly” appears.



Calmly announce your presence prior to working with the animals, by whistling, softly talking, etc.

Flight Zone and Point of Balance

A flight zone is an animal's personal safety zone. The size of the flight zone varies by animal breed, temperament, previous handling experience and angle of approach by the handler. Moving into the flight zone will cause the animal to move away.



In the above diagram, the circle represents the edge of the flight zone. Move to position A to make the animal move forward and move to position B to make the animal stop. Standing within the shaded area will force the sheep to move back. Also recognize and respect the animal's blind zone.

Social Behaviour

Sheep are flock animals and may feel threatened if separated from the flock. Having no natural defences, they find security by being among other sheep.



Physical Characteristics

Sheep are considered small livestock with mature ewes ranging from 50-115 kgs. Depending on breed, the weight of a mature ram ranges from 80-150 kgs. Obviously, a bunt from a sheep is capable of knocking a person down.

Rams are more aggressive than females, particularly during breeding season. Do not make a pet out of a ram. Doing so often decreases the respect a ram has for you and increases the possibility he may charge.



Adults must remember that although children may enjoy helping at lambing, the ewe may perceive the child as a threat to her young. Be alert to any warning signs the ewe sends out, like stomping her feet or shaking her head up and down. These are signs that she is angry and may charge.

Flock Protection

Due to the sheep's lack of natural defences, many flock owners use another species of animal to guard the animal. This other animal may be a guardian breed of dog, a donkey, llama, etc. Regardless of the type of animal, one must respect the guard animal's protective instincts. Always use caution when introducing new animals to the flock as they may be seen by the guard animal as a threat. Although the guard animal may often be friendly around familiar people, this attitude may suddenly change around strangers. Be aware of the animal's temperament and attitude at all times.



Handling of Individuals and Groups

Shearing, foot trimming and inoculations are examples of tasks that puts the handler into a situation where sheep may not always be cooperative. Working in close proximity to the animal increases the chances of being hurt. Consider the following points to ensure safety:



- ! **Gates.** It is ideal when handling sheep to use a proven handling facility such as the three examples shown on the following pages. However, when these facilities are not available, gates become very important. If you do not have a fixed handling facility, ensure there are enough portable gates to confine the animals in a small holding area. Small gates for lambing pens and longer gates for a portable handling system are an asset. Gates should be in good condition and free of protruding objects that may cause injuries. Make sure gates are securely attached to walls, etc.
- ! **Make sure anyone helping is physically capable to do the required task.**
- ! **Back injuries or strain can result from bending and working over the animals. Take time to change position regularly to avoid problems.**
- ! **Be well rested and alert. Accidents occur when one is over tired.**
- ! **Keep the work area as tidy as possible to prevent tripping and falling.**

Example 1: Combination Cattle and Sheep Facility



This photo shows the detail of this cattle/sheep handling facility. The animals are gathered into the holding area at the left. The crowd area is in the centre background and leads to the chute.

Vertical gate

Man gate

A vertical door near the back of the chute drops when an animal goes to the head gate, preventing the others from advancing. This allows the handler to do pregnancy checks, etc. without having the other animals too close. A man gate near the head gate allows access into the chute.



After the animal is finished in the head gate, it may be sent up the loading ramp onto a truck or trailer or may be diverted into another fenced area. The head gate may be released when standing outside the chute. Note that the head gate is removable. Should a cow suddenly go down while in the head gate, pins can be quickly knocked out, releasing the head gate. This gives the handler a quick means of releasing the cow from restraint and gives

access to it for treatment.

This diagram shows an overhead view of the above system. The double lines represent gates. The loading ramp features a gravel base, providing solid footing for the animals.

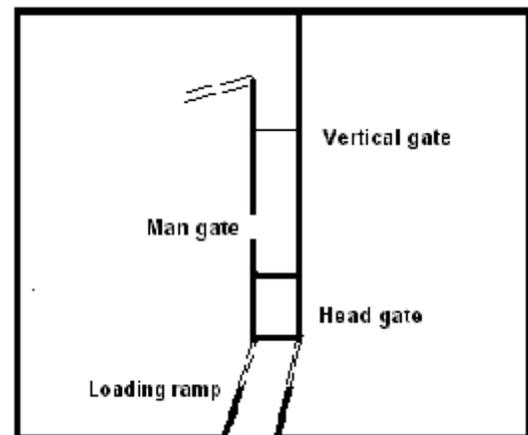


Diagram is not to scale

Example 2: Gates Set Up to Accommodate Several Tasks

On this sheep operation, gates play a vital role in the sorting, treating and general management duties needed for the livestock.



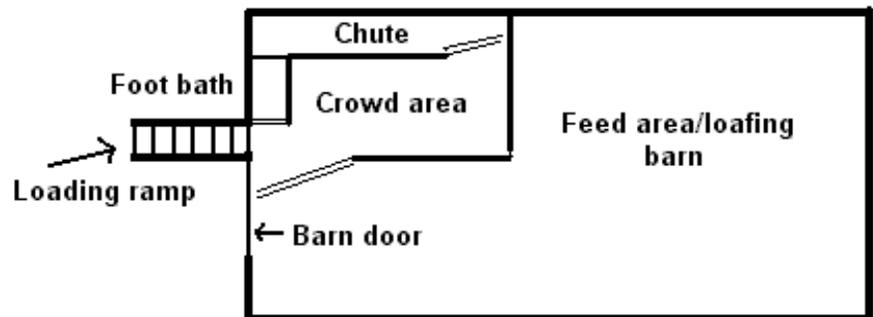
This photo shows the loading ramp used when sheep are entering or leaving the premises. Utilizing gates that can swing and/or slide, several options are available.

With the gates in this position, the sheep can be loaded or unloaded from the trailer or truck. New animals can be put through a foot bath as a preventative health measure. The chute provides a place to treat the animals as they progress through the system.



Swinging the gates in this position allows the handler to move the sheep outside into a fenced area after they have been through the handling system.

This photo shows an overhead angle of the above operation. The double lines represent gates.



Example 3: Crowd Area/Chute System With Scale

This system allows the handler to move the sheep through a scale with little difficulty. Located at the end of the animals' loafing area, a gate swings to move several animals into the crowd area. The gate can then be closed, directing the animals into the chute.



The chute leads directly into the scale. Animals at market weight can then be identified and readied for market.



This diagram shows an overhead view of the above system. The double lines represent gates. After the sheep leave the scale, they may return to the loafing area until they are ready to transport.

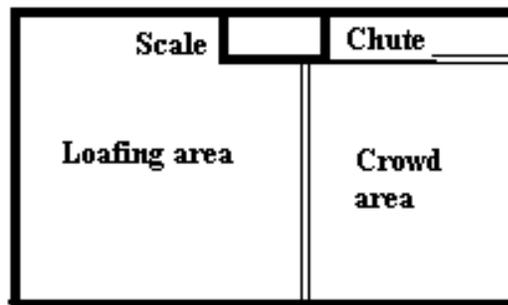


Diagram is not to scale