

Setting Up for Sheep Foot Inspection & Trimming

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Before beginning to assemble all tools and equipment to inspect or trim the feet of sheep, you may want to first consider the benefits of a handling system that can be used for more than hoof trimming.

In order to inspect or trim the feet of sheep, you need to flip each animal for a good view of the hoof. Your set-up to accomplish these tasks depends on the number of animals to be handled. However even for a small number of animals, a handling system makes these tasks easier, more organized, less of a strain on the handler, and likely less stress on the animals.



A handling system can be used for more than hoof trimming, as a large part of the expense for sheep production is in the handling of the animals. Handling animals is essential for making wise management decisions. Some of the tasks in sheep production that require animal handling include:

- Weighing
- Ear tagging
- Vaccinating
- Drenching (deworming)
- Pregnancy testing
- Foot trimming
- Foot bathing
- Sorting
- Weaning
- Inspecting
- Treatment
- FAMACHA© scoring
- Body condition scoring
- Loading

An efficient handling system will pay dividends by saving labor, reducing the risk of injury or strain to handlers,

reducing the stress on animals, providing convenience and allowing for more timely management of animals.

In setting up a handling system, consider the specific tasks you might need to accomplish at any time of year. Allow for ample space for gathering, handling, treatment, sorting, and releasing groups and individual animals. In addition, you will likely need to consider

- ample lighting (natural and provided)
- electrical power (for lighting, tilt table or other equipment)
- space for tools, supplies and equipment
- space for personnel (one side or both sides)
- space and a means for keeping records
- possible emergency treatment (first aid readiness for treatment of animals or workers)
- biosecurity measures (sanitizing and disinfecting of area and equipment)
- shade or cover and protection from the elements (sun, rain, wind, etc.)
- restriction or control of animal movement (backward, forward or sideways)

When planning a handling unit, flexibility or the ability to change pen size, direction of animal movement or treatment will likely be needed for ease in adjusting to a specific situation.

Components of an efficient handling system

- Gathering pen with capacity to hold a certain number of animals as well as to squeeze or reduce in size – directing animals to enter the chute
- Panels for chutes and pens (portable panels or sections enhance flexibility)
- Anti-backup device helps with the forward movement of animals.
- Head locking gate could be useful for some tasks such as ear tagging, blood drawing or FAMACHA© scoring.
- Sorting gates allows for ease in separating individual animals.
- Scales allow for monitoring the weights of individual animals.
- Tilt table allows for ease in flipping individual animals
- Foot bathing tub(s) to be placed within the chute
- Cleaning and disinfecting items such as brushes, brooms, shovel scraper, water and pressure washer.

A handling unit is typically laid out in a linear fashion — with animals moving from one grouping point to a desired grouping point.

Setting up for sheep feet inspection, trimming, bathing and sorting involve several components. Following is a list of tools, equipment, items and supplies typically needed for foot-related tasks.

- Trimming tools
 - Foot shears
 - Hoof knife
 - Utility knife (with extra blades)

- Helpful Equipment
 - Tilt table or
 - Sheep cradle/chair
- Foot bathing items
 - Foot bath tub(s)
 - Bucket(s) for mixing (5 gallon)
 - Drill motor with paint mixer attachment
 - Zinc sulfate powder*
 - Measurement container
 - Detergent — to improve penetration of footbath solution
 - Water
 - Junk wool or pine shavings — placed in the foot bath tub to reduce splashing
- Hoof cleaning items
 - Pump/spray bottle filled with zinc sulfate solution (10% or 20%)
 - Small Brush
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
 - Gloves
 - Work gloves
 - Examination gloves (disposable)
 - Safety glasses
 - Dust mask
 - Back support wrap
- First aid items (separate sets for humans and for livestock)
 - Eye wash bottle (filled)
 - Antiseptic wipes
 - Adhesive bandages
 - Blood stopper
 - Bandages or wraps
 - Antibiotic
 - Syringes
 - Needles
 - Thermometer
- Livestock markers (at least 3 different colors)

- Disinfecting supplies
 - Disinfectant
 - Tub or bucket
 - Brushes of varying sizes
- Recording supplies
 - Record sheet(s)
 - Pen(s) or pencil(s)
- Extras
 - Electronic scanning & recording device for electronic identification systems (EID)
 - Replacement ear tags
 - Dewormer (anthelmintic) with appropriate drench gun
 - Camera
 - Cell phone
 - FAMACHA© card
 - Nail apron for holding tools or supplies
 - Holster for foot shears or knife
 - Totes for transporting & storing supplies
 - Drinking water for handlers

The Inspection, Trimming, Scoring, Treatment & Sorting Process

1. Gather animals to begin the process. This gathering can be done in a single group or in groups. If possible, start with animals that show no signs of lameness.
2. Move animals in single file down chute to trimming/inspection point
3. Identify and record individual sheep
4. Flip sheep
5. Trim and/or inspect each foot of each sheep
6. Score and record individual feet (clean, uncertain or infected)
7. Mark each animal (clean, uncertain or infected)
8. Move animals to foot bathing point
9. Sort animals (clean, uncertain or infected)
10. Move animals to drying point
11. Release clean animals to pens or a pasture on which no sheep (or goats) have been for at least 2 weeks
12. Isolate uncertain sheep in a group. Do not mix these animals with others until you are certain they show no signs of infection. The feet of these sheep should be inspected weekly, treated weekly with a 10% zinc sulfate foot bath and possibly given an antibiotic (topical treatment on infected foot or injected).

13. Isolate sheep with one or more infected feet in a separate group – strongly consider culling these sheep. If kept on the farm, these sheep feet should be inspected weekly, treated weekly with a 10% zinc sulfate foot bath and possibly given an antibiotic (topical treatment on infected foot or injected intramuscular).
14. Remove foot bathtubs from the area. Dispose of zinc sulfate solution off the farm or place in manure pile for spreading. Avoid dumping foot bath solution in the same location repeatedly. Sweep and power wash floors on which sheep moved. Power wash and disinfect tubs and tip table. Wash and disinfect all tools and equipment. Launder clothing.
15. Repeat this process weekly for 4 weeks. Always start the process with the non-infected group. Uncertain individual sheep or group follows non-infected group. Infected sheep or group of sheep always goes last.
16. Unless for immediate slaughter, do not sell sheep to others until foot rot is eliminated from your farm.

Final Step — Clean Up and Disinfection

It is important to clean all equipment, tools, totes and clothing following the handling of sheep after foot trimming. Be thorough in washing all items. Use a high-pressure sprayer to blast the tilt table and flooring where foot trimming took place. Sweep or scrape the area and dispose of trimmings and debris before pressure washing. After cleaning, coat the tilt table and dip tools with disinfectant. Allow these items to air dry before coating with a film of penetrating oil or a moisture-replacing spray. Launder all clothing worn by handlers as soon as possible after foot trimming has been completed for the day. Clean all foot wear thoroughly and disinfect.

* Zinc sulfate should be handled with care. Read and follow the material safety data sheet (MSDS) for handling zinc sulfate.

Reviewed by Susan Schoenian, Small Ruminant Specialist, University of Maryland

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