

Tackle Routine Management Tasks With A Well Designed Mgm't System

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A well-designed sheep-handling facility where animals can be restrained is very useful for routine management practices such as parasite control, vaccinations, pregnancy checking or sorting. A handling facility can be simple or elaborate; the key is sheep should willingly move through the system in a quiet and efficient manner. Another important point is that the handling system should save greatly on labor requirements when working sheep. Each handling facility will differ based on the needs of the operation, location of the facility, and size of the flock. A basic handling facility should include a holding pen with a working chute. Panels with dropdown sides provide easier access while restraining sheep for vaccinations, drenching, or pregnancy checking. Other components that are very useful in a handling system are access gates, a scale, a sorting gate, and a loading area. Producers with larger flocks may also want to include a turntable for trimming feet.

The first component of a handling system is a holding pen to gather the sheep. The holding pen should be large enough to comfortably hold all the sheep in one group. The holding pen should also include an area that funnels sheep into the working chute.

Solid sided panels in the working chute allow sheep to move through a system more readily because they don't get distracted by activities taking place outside the chute system. Curved panels can also be used to take advantage of an animal's natural tendency to move in a circle.

Gates placed within the system can be used to prevent sheep from backing up while performing routine health care tasks. Sorting gates are also useful for sorting one group of sheep into two or more groups. There are a number of different types of gates.

The scales is a critical piece of equipment for sheep producers who wish to track sheep performance. There are a number of different scales from small hanging scales with a sling used to weigh newborns or small lambs to larger scales designed to weigh weaned lambs on up to mature sheep. Scales that are designed for livestock generally use a dial scale, a balance beam, or a digital readout.

Another useful component in a handling system is a turntable for trimming feet on large numbers of sheep. The turntable squeezes a sheep to restrain it and then the sheep is laid onto its side. The feet are easily accessible for the producer to trim feet or treat for problems. Another option for foot trimming is a sheep deck chair, however this piece of equipment is not easily incorporated into a handling, but rather may be used as sheep walk out of the system. The chair hangs on a gate and then the sheep is backed up to the edge of the cradle and flipped back into the netting. This allows the producer to trim feet without having to balance the sheep on his or her legs to hold the sheep upright while sitting on its rear.

Foot rot and foot scald are major issues that many shepherds have to deal with. In order to treat groups of sheep, a footbath can be incorporated into a handling system. The footbath

is filled most commonly with a zinc sulfate solution to kill the bacteria that causes these diseases.

A final component of the handling system could be a loading area. The loading area can be set up for loading sheep onto a truck or onto a trailer. A ramp would be needed for loading onto trucks. Or, the chute system can be extended to the door of a trailer.

Handling Facility Guidelines: A handling facility is no good to a producer if the sheep do not willingly walk through the system. Understanding how sheep think and how they see can help you plan a well-designed system. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when setting up a handling system:

1. The system should be located somewhere that is easily accessible by sheep, and by trucks and trailers. The system should also be in an area with good drainage to avoid working in the mud during wet times of the year. Level areas are preferred; if that is not an option, sheep will move more readily on a slight uphill grade.
2. Sheep are more willing to move toward a lighted area than toward a dark area. However, they also do not like direct sunlight in their faces, so locate chutes so that they face either north or south. If locating the handling system inside, install good lighting.
3. Walk through the chute system to look for areas that might spook the sheep. Animals do not like changes in lighting within the system such as shadows or bright sunlight shining on the floor. Animals will also balk if objects, such as a coat or halter, are lying across the chute panels.
4. Take advantage of an animal's natural tendency to circle by constructing the chute with curves. This also prevents animals from seeing what is happening further down the chute system.
5. Construct the chute system with solid sides to prevent sheep from becoming distracted by sights outside of the handling system. The system should be both tall enough and strong enough to prevent animals from escaping.
6. Check the system for any corners or places where an animal could become bruised. Check all bolts to make sure that none are exposed because they could cause bruises or cuts on the animal.
7. Consider ways to minimize the amount of noise created by working animals through the system. Sheep will tend to balk at loud or unusual noises.

These considerations for a handling system can save producers time as well as decrease the amount of manual labor required for routine management tasks. A well designed system is a very useful and cost effective tool for any size sheep operation.



This chute system gathers sheep in a line with one following another in order to restrain the sheep for routine handling. The drop-down sides of this solid sided panel allow easier access to the sheep once they have entered the system.