







Raising the welfare standards for dairy sheep

	Requirement	Why is it important	SPCA Certified Standard	Code of Welfare Minimum Standards
 <p>SHEEP HEALTH</p>	Food and water	High quality and sufficient food and water help dairy sheep to maintain good health. It is important that the food, and the way it is fed, minimise the risk of nutritional disorders such as bloat, acidosis, and mineral and vitamin deficiencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pasture must be able to meet the nutritional requirements of all stages of life and production, or additional feed must be provided. Trace element supplementation is in place and monitored. Free access to clean, fresh water at all times. Water quality is tested at least every three years and for new water sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient quantities of food provided to maintain good health, meet physiological needs, and minimise nutritional disorders. Trace element supplementation not required. Access to water must meet daily needs and water must not be harmful to health. No water quality testing required.
	Lamb feeding	<p>Lambs need adequate amounts of colostrum to ensure they have the best start in life as it supports their immune system and helps to protect them from becoming sick.</p> <p>They should receive sufficient liquid feed in multiple feeds per day to allow them to grow, be healthy, and to meet their behavioural need to suckle. Lambs that receive insufficient milk will be hungry and will not grow well. Lambs are motivated to suckle and not being able to do so often enough can be frustrating to lambs and can lead to abnormal oral behaviours such as gnawing on housing materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hand-reared lambs are given 150-250ml per kilo of bodyweight of colostrum or milk for the first week after birth, fed in at least three feeds a day. Thereafter, lambs must be fed milk at 15% of their bodyweight in at least three feeds a day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient colostrum to ensure welfare. Suitable liquid feed until rumen can utilise pasture/other solids.
	Mastitis	Mastitis is a painful inflammation of the udder and early detection and quick treatment will help to reduce pain and improve welfare outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signs of mastitis must be treated immediately. Udders must be regularly inspected for signs of dirt and damage, and cleaned/treated as necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signs of ill-health or injury must result in timely preventative or remedial action, as appropriate. No regular udder inspections required.
	Lameness	Lame sheep experience discomfort and/or pain when putting pressure on their feet/legs. Early detection and quick treatment of the underlying problem will help to reduce pain and improve welfare outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A plan must be in place to manage the incidence of lameness at flock level to below 5%. Lameness must be treated as soon as possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No requirements around lameness.
	Pain relief	Some husbandry procedures undertaken in dairy sheep, such as castration and tail docking, can cause significant anxiety, fear, discomfort, and pain. Minimising pain and associated stress will result in better welfare outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre- and post-operative pain relief required when doing surgical procedures, regardless of the animal's age. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Required for some, but not all procedures. Not required for all ages.
 <p>ENVIRONMENT</p>	Pasture access	Housing dairy sheep can be beneficial, such as protecting them from extreme weather, but prolonged housing can lead to welfare problems. Pasture access allows dairy sheep to engage in normal behaviours, such as grazing, and gives them some choice over what food to eat and where to rest, and provides them with the opportunity to access shade and shelter, promoting positive mental experiences and welfare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dairy sheep must be provided with pasture access for grazing when weather permits. They must not be housed permanently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No limit on time off paddock. No grazing/pasture access required.
	Shade and shelter	Provision of shade and shelter ensures that animals can decide whether to stand in the sun, wind or rain, or out of it to avoid discomfort and heat and cold stress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to shade and shelter at all times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to shade and shelter at all times. Access to shelter to reduce the risk to health and welfare caused by exposure to cold and provide means to minimise the effects of heat stress.
	Shearing	<p>Shearing makes sheep more comfortable. It also reduces the risk of parasite infestations that can cause serious issues such as fly strike.</p> <p>In winter, freshly shorn sheep are vulnerable as they have lost the insulation from their fleece. They will need more food and shelter to keep warm and comfortable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sheep must be shorn at least once a year or more often to prevent welfare issues. Winter shearing must be approved by SPCA Certified and a management plan must be in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No minimum number required. No specific requirements for winter shearing.
	Milking	To ensure milking is not stressful, it is important that dairy sheep that are lactating for the first time are introduced to the milking system over several sessions in a calm and gentle manner. This will allow them to get used to the milking machinery and having their udders handled to foster a comfortable, positive milking experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A plan must be in place to familiarise dairy sheep with the milking system before their first lactation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No requirements around milking dairy sheep.
 <p>BEHAVIOUR</p>	Enrichment	<p>Enrichment makes an animal's environment more interesting, encouraging them to explore and engage in normal behaviours to meet their mental and physical needs.</p> <p>Enrichment for housed lambs include straw bales to promote climbing and investigatory behaviours. They also need sufficient space for running, jumping, and playing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lambs housed indoors or in pens must be provided with suitable enrichment and sufficient space to promote normal behaviours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrichment not required.
	Weaning lambs	Keeping lambs with their mothers until natural weaning helps encourage the social bond between the two, creating positive mental experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weaning of lambs does not occur before they have reached approximately 13kg in body weight. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No minimum age for weaning.
 <p>CONSUMER ASSURANCES</p>	Animal welfare audits	Announced and particularly unannounced audits ensure transparency, integrity, and credibility of standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independently audited by an external company, annually, and at least one unannounced audit/year. Additionally, SPCA Certified visit every single farm when they join the programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Animal welfare audits not required.
	Free from sub-therapeutic antibiotics	Using antibiotics sub-therapeutically - where there is no diagnosed disease, condition, or microorganism (bacteria etc) - can lead to antibiotic resistance and means that healthy animals are unnecessarily treated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of prescribed therapeutic antibiotics for the treatment of a specific, diagnosed condition, disease, or injury only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medication can only be used in accordance with registration conditions and manufacturer's instructions or professional advice.