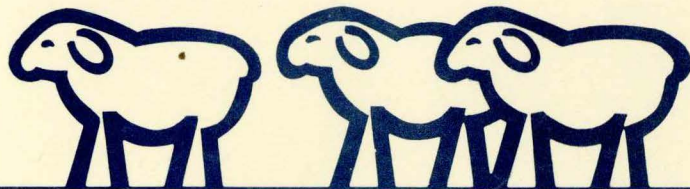


# sheep management



## fact sheet no. 6

### Foot Trimming

Foot trimming serves two important functions: (1) it helps a sheep walk and stay sound on its feet and legs, and (2) aids in the prevention of foot rot.

#### Trimming Healthy Feet

The following steps outline the method for routine trimming of healthy feet.

#### Step 1. Catching the sheep.

Corrals, pens, and working alleys should be prepared so that each sheep can be caught without spending extra time or energy.

#### Step 2. Getting the sheep in position.

For small flocks, the shepherd that is strong can catch the sheep and set it on its rump much as is done for shearing. No mechanical equipment or aid would be involved.

Catch sheep in rear flank, then place left hand under the jaw with the right hand at the dock, the left side of sheep held firmly against your legs (fig. 1). Slip left thumb in sheep's mouth back of incisor teeth, move right hand to region of right hip and flank (fig. 1). Hold the lower jaw tightly. Turn sheep's head sharply over its right shoulder. Press down with right hand, forcing sheep to drop down from a standing position on the rear legs. Twist sheep slightly as you move your feet under the rump, raising the head and positioning the back of the sheep between your legs (fig. 2).

Get sheep to relax by bending the neck, allowing the head to lie comfortably along the side (fig. 3). Grasp one hind leg around the pastern, bringing it toward you for trimming (fig. 3). Follow same procedure for other rear leg and front legs in turn.

Three or four mechanical devices are available commercially as aids to restrain sheep for foot trimming. They all work and are a great aid to trimming the feet in flocks over 100 or perhaps even 50 head.

#### Step 3. Trimming.

A sharp, specially designed hoof shears is the best tool for trimming. A pocket knife with a strong, sharp blade would be satisfactory also. A compressed air-powered shears, manufactured in Australia, is helpful in large flocks and flocks infected with foot rot.

Grasp the pastern firmly in one hand. Get the point of the hoof shears or knife under the overgrown hoof wall. Trim until the hoof wall is level with the sole of the foot. This trimming will also shorten the toe to the proper length.

Hooves extremely long from neglect may first be shortened quickly by cutting off the ends. Exercise care in doing this. Hooves that are badly misshapen require special trimming. The hoof wall may be trimmed from the side. Periodic, repeated trimming can restore toes to near normal shape. As a rule, no trimming should take place on the soft tissue or pad. Only excess loose pieces of the soft tissue of the sole should be trimmed.

Special care should be exercised in trimming so as not to injure the foot. Trimming too short will result in some bleeding. This should be avoided, but is usually not serious with the only problem being brief lameness on the foot.

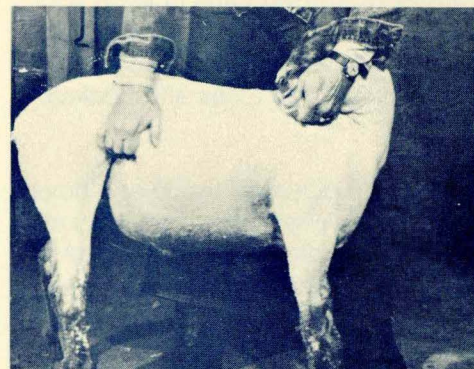


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

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## Trimming Feet Infected with Foot Rot

### Step 1.

Trim all overgrown parts of each hoof (fig. 4). Pare all ragged or separated horn and sole. Remove all horn or sole covering infected areas and pockets.

### Step 2.

Pare a little diseased tissue at a time, until you have removed every pocket, crevice, and crack from the infected foot. Cut off all tissue that has separated from the foot and all tissue that shows evidence of infection.

### Step 3.

Probe carefully for hidden or deep pockets of infection. If necessary, cut healthy tissue to reach the infected area. After trimming, re-examine the foot to make sure all diseased tissue has been removed.

### Step 4.

After trimming each hoof, disinfect the knife or shears by washing in soap and water and then dipping in a small container of disinfectant. Burn all foot rot parings; they contain foot rot bacteria.

### Step 5.

When the last toe is trimmed but before releasing the sheep, put a chalk mark down the back to identify it as having been trimmed. This would not be necessary if a cradle were used in a chute which automatically keeps the trimmed and untrimmed animals separated.

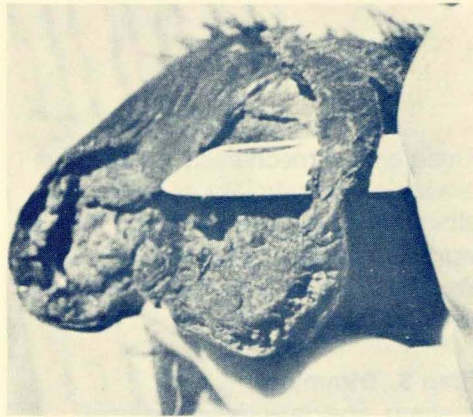


Fig. 4

Hooves infected with foot rot require more severe trimming of exposed diseased tissue.

### Trimming Schedule

The potential for a foot rot outbreak is greatest during wet weather. In Iowa this period is in late winter and spring. Trim the feet prior to this period so that the feet are in good condition at this critical time. Trimming can be done in an early lambing program as ewes are taken from the lambing pens. This spreads the work over 30 or more days. Trimming again prior to flushing in conjunction with a pre-flushing or pre-breeding worming would save gathering and handling the ewes twice. White-faced ewes may need to have their feet trimmed twice annually. Black-face and black-face crossbred ewes may need only one trimming each year. Ewes in confinement may require more frequent trimming intervals.

Commercial market lambs going to slaughter normally do not need their feet trimmed. Breeding rams should have their feet trimmed at least twice annually—with one trimming done six weeks prior to breeding and combined with a breeding soundness evaluation. Replacement ewe lambs should have their feet trimmed in mid-summer and then after that on a schedule with the mature ewes.

### Foot Bath Treatment

After trimming the feet of a healthy flock, it is advisable to put all the sheep through a 10% zinc sulfate foot bath. A more detailed procedure is involved in a foot rot-infected flock.

### Safety

Trimmed toes have sharp points and edges. Some sheep struggle and strike. Trim the rear feet first on hand held sheep, then the front feet. Be extremely watchful and avoid being struck in the neck, chin, or face with a newly trimmed front foot.

Shears and knives used to trim feet work better when sharp. Use every precaution to avoid cutting yourself, especially when trimming feet without benefit of a cradle to restrain the sheep. It is generally safer to release the leg of a kicking sheep than it is to try to control it by brute strength.

File: Animal Science—Sheep

Prepared by Dan Morrical, extension sheep specialist, and Gene Hettel, communication specialist, agriculture.



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