



ALPACA FACT SHEET #15.01

Welfare, Education & Training Draft 2022

Shearing: A Quick Guide

What you should expect from your shearer

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What your shearer should expect from you!

Introduction

Alpacas, in general, need to be sheared every year. Whilst there may occasionally be specific reasons not to shear this should be the rare exception. Shearing allows close, hands on, appreciation of the animals' condition and identification of ongoing or potential issues which would otherwise be disguised due to the fibre length.

Annual shearing helps avoid or reduce the risk of a number of issues including heat stroke, skin conditions, fly strike and more.

Historically Suri alpacas have been shorn every two years, mostly to allow for the longer Suri fibre to be harvested; this does not mean however that they are any less likely to suffer from the issues mentioned above, and if the fibre is not required to be of a two year growth it is recommended that they be shorn every year.

Reasons for not shearing may include poor body score due to age or illness or perhaps having been left for some reason until very late in the season. Even when left late it should be possible to shear but leaving extra length on the fibre to ensure adequate insulation going into colder weather. This should be discussed with your shearer to ensure they have appropriate equipment. Hand shearing of very old or frail alpacas may be helpful to reduce stress and possible injury – again this needs to be discussed with your shearer in advance.

Wet animals cause delays and can ruin otherwise useful fibre – your shearer may refuse to shear your animals if presented wet. Please be considerate to your animals, your shearer and yourself and make every effort to keep your animals dry.

Should you wish to sell or otherwise use your fibre harvest it will pay to be diligent and ensure you minimize contamination with less desirable fibres (fibre from legs/belly/head/neck etc.), short/second cuts, left over fibre from other animals (esp different colours/qualities), debris from the floor (dirt, hay/straw, faeces, toenail clippings etc etc) Fleeces should be stored dry and away from risk of moth/rodent/insect infestation.

Not shearing because animals are in good condition is not acceptable as it increases the risks outlined above

Being prepared well in advance of shearing will pay dividends and make the experience much less stressful for you, your animals and your shearer.

The BAS holds a list of shearers on its website but it should be noted these shearers are not endorsed by the BAS and the list is provided only to enable owners to easily find shearers. Not all shearers may be on the BAS list. Your local Alpaca group may also be of assistance in finding/contacting a shearer.

Shearers often get booked up a long way in advance so it is wise not to leave it to the last minute and expect to find a shearer to fit in with you so earlier the better – many owners book up the previous year!! Plan a fall back date if you can with your shearer in case something prevents you shearing on your first



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preferred date – lots of things can go wrong – most usually around the weather but also, for example, other people being poorly prepared and causing delays to the shearers.

Important :

By law only veterinarians or owners (under the guidance of a veterinarian) are permitted to administer injections and only veterinarians are permitted to correct teeth issues. The BAS are aware however that many shearers offer such services and should you decide to avail yourself it is recommended the following be considered:

If you are not supplying the vaccine /wormer can you be sure it has been stored correctly at the right temperature and following the manufacturers guidance?

Is the vaccine correct for your land and animals history – if in doubt consult your veterinarian.

Efficacy of vaccines may not be optimal when given to animals under stress (eg shearing) the same may well hold true for worming etc.

Trimming teeth should be an odd exception and not a regular occurrence – animals with severely overgrown teeth need to be assessed and addressed on a case by case basis – suddenly reducing the length of teeth may break into the pulp cavity causing immense pain and suffering as well as risk of disease and possible loss of the teeth.

On page 3 of this factsheet you will find a list of what you and your shearer should expect of one another. View shearing as a partnership between you and your shearer for the wellbeing of your animals. This list is not exhaustive but should give you some ideas of what to expect – your specific situation may require additional or alternative considerations.

Managing expectations and being prepared will make everybody much happier!

On page 4 you will find some considerations which will help maximise the quality of the fibre harvest.

On page 5 you will find a checklist which may help in planning your shearing day(s)



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What you should expect from your shearer

- You should expect your shearer to communicate clearly with you – confirming the date and time they expect to arrive and any specific requirements they might have which might include access to power, decent lighting, suitable undercover facilities in case of poor weather. If they do not give you this information you should request it.
- You should expect your shearer to tell you if they need or expect assistance; again if they do not you should check.
- You should expect your shearer to advise you of any changes to their planned arrival; If they plan to arrive and shear in the dark you may wish to use your fall back date unless you feel happy you have appropriate facilities/lighting. Shearing by head torch etc. should be a last resort endeavor as it carries much more risk and less chance of picking up issues.
- Your shearer should disinfect all their equipment before starting on your animals and you should satisfy yourself before allowing them to commence.
- You should expect your shearer to handle your animals with sensitivity and respect – manhandling animals by picking them up by the tail is not acceptable. Restraining animals should be done in a gentle manner – animals and people can and do get hurt if this is done poorly. Additionally turning animals should be done carefully, evenly and gently. If you are unhappy in any way you must make it known. If the shearer persists you should ask them to stop and find another shearer.
- In general it is best to restrict the days activities to just shearing and possibly toenail trimming as this is a stressful time for the animals and trying to 'fit in' other jobs can cause unnecessary stress at best and at worst may reduce the effectiveness of the 'treatment' –specifically vaccinations and worming.

What your shearer should expect from you

- You should communicate clearly with your shearer – be clear about your dates, confirm the number of animals (males, females , if appropriate also the number pregnant and how many months at the time of shearing. Confirm this when they arrive. Don't spring extra animals on them without prior notice - they have a timetable to keep.
- Have a plan for the day – how to move animals around so the shearer is not kept waiting.
- Make sure you can have animals where they can easily be caught and moved – the shearer should not be expected to go chasing your animals around a big field.
- Plan for poor weather before or after shearing so they can be sheared dry and kept dry afterwards – consider coats for any you expect or know to be thin or affected by the cold.
- Have adequate lead ropes and halters if required.
- Have enough people to help get the job done and some 'spares' you can call on at short notice should you be let down.
- Make sure helpers understand what their role is – give them specific jobs.
- Think carefully before inviting lots of spectators – they will get in the way and distract you from the job in hand – people wandering about can cause accidents both to themselves and potentially to you your animals and the shearer – there is very sharp blades, electricity ropes and stressed animals – a bad combination.
- Make sure you have all the things you need – paper/notebook/pens/markers/first aid kit/ working electric/ water and disinfectant/brushes for clearing up fibre/ old t-shirts/rags/towels for pee/poo and spit/ bags/bins for fleece(First/seconds/thirds/floor sweeping.
- Tell/remind the shearer what you expect (checking teeth, trimming toenails, type of haircuts / topknots/ tails/fibre samples for analysis/ show fleeces)
- If you intend to give injections etc be aware of the level of stress the animal(s) are under – whilst convenient it may not be the best time. Also make sure you are not hindering the shearing process.



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Paddock Management and pre-shearing housing from a fibre perspective:

Vegetable matter (VM) in fleeces is always undesirable and anything you can do to minimise this will produce a more useable/saleable fleece and save you time in the long term.

In the weeks before shearing:

- Minimise seed bearing weeds as seeds invariably have hooks and are difficult to remove from fleece.
- Avoid topping or mowing to minimise grass getting stuck in fleece.
- Remove hedge cuttings and cut out brambles from field edges.
- Place hay racks low to (but not on) the ground to prevent cria getting covered in seeds.
- Don't place hay on the ground and pick up loose, uneaten hay.
- Avoid bedding material such as wood shavings, saw dust and crushed stone.

Helper Tasks On Shearing Day

On the day of shearing if you have helpers here is a list of activities they could perform (please ensure helpers are competent if you are asking them to manage animals)

- To move animals to the penning area and turn them out afterwards
- To bring alpacas from the holding pen to the shearing mat
- Sweeping between each animal
- Collect and labelling fleeces of each grades
- Labelling fibre samples
- Carrying blankets away for skirting if shorn flat
- Providing refreshments

Shearing Day

Top tip: If your alpacas can be kept inside the night before, off the grass, they are less likely to urinate during shearing. **Your alpacas must be dry for being sheared.**

Your alpacas should have access to fresh water and hay all day if the shearing queue is a long one. Ideally keep them in their usual groups to minimise stress (and potential sweating).

If shearing early or late in the season, they will need shelter from very hot weather or protection from the cold. Alpacas are acclimatised to the UK however extremes of temperature post shearing can kill. Alpaca coats should be at hand for vulnerable animals who may well feel the cold having had their fibre sheared off.

Discuss and agree with your shearer what your expectations are before you get started; colour order, appearance, mid side samples, top knots, toes, teeth, who's doing what etc.

Ensure all equipment coming onto your farm is disinfected – either by your shearer or by yourselves ahead of shearing. (Clean and disinfect all equipment coming onto your farm.)

Have a list of your animals prepared and know which fleeces are likely to be for show, production, thirds etc. Taking fibre samples ahead of shearing helps with knowing what you are likely to do with each fleece.



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Shearing Checklist	
Shearing date booked :	
Fallback/reserve date:	
Shearer name & contact number:	
Number of Males:	
Number of Females:	
Number of Cria (& age at shearing):	
Shearing Order List (eg Colour / age / quality):	
Electric/ Extension cables available:	
Lighting:	
Bin/s for Sweepings:	
Bags for 1sts, 2nds and 3rds:	
Fleece sample bags :	
Pens/Markers, Sticky labels/Paper:	
Notebook for observations etc:	
Sweeping Brushes for floor:	
Headcollars/Leadropes:	
Rags/T-shirts/towels for pee/poo etc:	
First aid kit (for alpacas):	
First aid kit (for humans):	
Penning/Hurdles:	
Anchor points for ropes:	
Disinfectant:	
Toenail Trimmers:	
Food/Drinks:	

Disclaimer: The management practices detailed in this overview do not constitute veterinary advice. Any alpaca appearing to have an adverse condition should be assessed by a veterinarian.