



**ANIMAL CARE AND WELL-BEING
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

SHEEP



Q. Why are the sheep chewing gum?

A. They're not really chewing gum, they're *chewing their cud* – or in scientific terms, *ruminating*. Sheep, cattle, goats and camels are *ruminant animals*. That means the animal has a four-chambered stomach and can digest feed that a single-chambered human stomach can't handle. A sheep's *cud* is food it has belched up from the first stomach chamber. Chewing the food again grinds it into very small pieces that are more easily digested in the next stomach chamber, the *rumen*.

Q. Why are there more than one sheep in one pen?

A. Sheep like to hang out with each other in a pen because they're very social, herd animals! If sheep can't see, hear, smell or touch other sheep is stressful to them.

Q. Do sheep have tails?

A. Sheep are born with tails, but they are often removed, or *docked*, when they are young to keep them healthy. Manure and urine can collect in the wool by their tails. This dirty area can attract flies, which burrow in the sheep's skin and lay eggs there. This creates a painful illness called *fly strike*, which can kill sheep. Docking the tails keeps manure from collecting and protects the sheep from getting fly strike.

Q. How can you tell if a sheep is sick?

A. Farmers carefully watch their sheep's normal behavior, so they can often tell when an animal isn't feeling well just by the way it's acting. Sick sheep eat and drink less and rest a lot more than usual. They may also have a fever or show other symptoms. If farmers recognize any of these signs of illness, they can take appropriate action to help the sheep get better.



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Q. What are the tags in the sheep ears?

A. Every sheep has an identification number printed on its ear tag. Farmers use the number to find a sheep quickly. If there is a disease outbreak, veterinarians can use these tags to track sick animals.

Q. Do sheep always make this much noise?

A. Sheep are quite vocal. They use different sounds to communicate with other sheep. Because sheep are social animals, they may become fearful when alone in the pen if they don't see other sheep. If a sheep can hear another sheep, then it will know it's not alone. Sheep also warn other sheep of any danger, and ewes, or mother sheep, call to their lambs.

Q. Does it hurt your sheep when you hold on to its head and neck when you show it?

A. Applying gentle pressure on the sheep's neck and behind the head is called *bracing*. To the sheep, it feels as if it's wearing a halter. It does not hurt the sheep if done correctly. If the sheep moves away or begins to cough, the handler should release pressure and try again to make sure the sheep is comfortable. Positioning a sheep in this way shows off its muscling and design to the judge.

Q. Do the sheep with wool feel hot?

A. No. Wool is an amazing fiber! It helps to insulate and keep sheep warm and dry in the winter, and cool in the summer because it holds air in between all the individual fibers.

Q. Does it hurt sheep when their wool is cut off?

A. No. Cutting the wool of sheep, or *shearing* them, does not hurt them. Shearing is similar to when you get a haircut – you don't feel anything! Shearing sheep is a learned skilled that takes a lot of patience and practice. A sheep may be sheared in a stand with its head held in a similar position to the *brace* or while it's being held on the ground.

Q. Why do the sheep wear coats?

A. The coats or blankets help keep the sheep clean while they are at the fair. This reduces the time that the handlers need to groom them before showing. Both *meat breeds*, sheep that will be used primarily as food, and *wool breeds*, sheep used primarily to produce fiber, can wear coats or blankets to reduce the amount of dirt, manure and feed on their fleece. Young animals that do not have long wool may also wear coats or blankets during the winter to keep warm.



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