

Northern Ireland Code of Recommendations  
for the Welfare of Livestock:  
**Sheep**



Department of  
**Agriculture and  
Rural Development**

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# Sheep

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# Sheep



## PREFACE

This preface is not part of the Code; instead, it explains the Code's role and the broad considerations on which it is based. The legal text in shaded boxes throughout this document is not part of the Code either but highlights the legal position. The text in these boxes is the law as it stands on the date that this Code is published or reprinted (please turn to the back cover for this information). Shepherds should be aware that any of the legal requirements quoted here could change - they should check that these are an accurate statement of the law as it currently stands.

Regulation 10 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that:

- (1) Any person who employs or engages a person to attend to animals shall ensure that the person attending to the animals-
  - (a) is acquainted with the provisions of any statutory welfare codes relating to the animals to which he attends;
  - (b) has access to a copy of all such codes while he is attending to the animals; and
  - (c) has received instruction and guidance on those welfare codes.
- (2) Any person who keeps animals, or who causes or knowingly permits animals to be kept, shall not attend to them unless he has at the time access to all statutory welfare codes relating to the animals to which he attends, and he is acquainted with the provisions of those codes.
- (3) In Regulation 2 it states that "statutory welfare code" means a code for the time being issued under section 3 of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 or regulation 14.

To cause, or knowingly to allow, any farm animal to suffer unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress is an offence under section 1 of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972. The breach of a code provision, whilst not an offence in itself, can nevertheless be used in evidence as tending to establish the guilt of anyone accused of causing the offence of causing unnecessary pain or distress under the Act (Section 1).

## Sheep



Regulation 3(1) of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that owners and keepers of animals shall take all reasonable steps:

- to ensure the welfare of the animals; and
- to ensure that the animals are not caused any unnecessary pain, suffering, injury or distress.

Regulation 3(3) of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that:

- when deciding whether the conditions under which any animal is bred or kept comply with the requirements set out in Schedule 1 of the Regulations, the owner and keeper of the animal shall have regard to its species, and to its degree of development, adaptation and domestication, and to its physiological and ethological needs in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge.

Regulation 11 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that:

Where an authorised officer considers that animals are being kept in a way which is

- (a) likely to cause them unnecessary pain, suffering, injury or distress; or
- (b) otherwise in contravention of any provision of these Regulations,

he may serve a notice on the person appearing to him to be in charge of the animals requiring him, within the period stated in the notice, to take any action that the authorised officer considers to be reasonably necessary to ensure compliance with these Regulations and the authorised officer shall give his reasons for requiring any action to be taken.

Regulation 13(2) of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that:

- in any proceedings against an owner or keeper of animals for a failure to comply with regulation 3(1) or 3(2), the owner or keeper as the case maybe, may rely on his compliance with any relevant recommendation contained in a statutory welfare code as tending to establish his compliance with the relevant provision.

# Sheep



The Code aims to encourage all those who care for farm animals to follow the highest standards of husbandry. Without good stockmanship, animal welfare can never be properly protected. If shepherds follow this Code, it will help them to meet the necessary welfare standards. No matter how acceptable a system may be in principle, without competent, diligent stockmanship, the welfare of the animals cannot be adequately catered for.

The welfare of sheep is considered within a framework that was developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council (an independent advisory body established by the Government in 1979) and known as the 'Five Freedoms'. These form a logical basis for assessing animal welfare within any husbandry system, together with taking the action necessary to protect animal welfare within the limitations of an efficient livestock industry.

The Five Freedoms are:-

**1. Freedom from hunger and thirst**

- By ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.

**2. Freedom from discomfort**

- By providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

**3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease**

- By prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

**4. Freedom to express normal behaviour**

- By providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals' own kind.

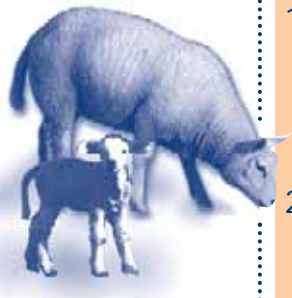
**5. Freedom from fear and distress**

- By ensuring conditions and treatment to avoid mental suffering.

In acknowledging these freedoms, those who have care of livestock should practice:

- caring and responsible planning and management
- skilled, knowledgeable and conscientious stockmanship
- an appropriate environmental design (e.g. of the husbandry system)
- considerate handling and transport
- humane slaughter.

## Sheep



1. The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 contains the general law relating to cruelty to animals. Broadly it is an offence (under Section 13 of the Act) to cause any unnecessary suffering to any domestic or captive animal by anything that is done or omitted to be done.
2. Under Section 27 of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 the court has the power to disqualify a person convicted under the Act from having custody of any animal.

The ban can specify a particular kind of animal or all animals for such period as the court thinks fit.

**This Code has been issued by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and applies in Northern Ireland only.**

# Sheep




## INTRODUCTION

1. In this Code the word “sheep” refers to all ovine stock, and an animal under 6 months of age is considered to be a lamb.
2. The recommendations are relevant to sheep under all husbandry systems. Following them will help to ensure that the welfare of stock is safeguarded.
3. The number and type of sheep kept and the stocking rate and/or housing density should depend on the suitability of the environment, the capacity of the farm, the competence of the shepherd and the time available to carry out his or her duties. Good stockmanship is of paramount importance in all systems of sheep production.
4. The relevant animal welfare legislation applies to owners as well as any person looking after sheep on their behalf, wherever the sheep are located. A written contract can be of value in ensuring that all parties are clear about their responsibilities in respect of welfare. However, the obligations imposed by law will still apply.
5. If any change in breed or type is contemplated, particularly if farming in difficult, extensive conditions, replacement should only be with a breed or type of sheep that is suitable for the location. For example, on hill farms sheep should be sufficiently hardy and not prone to suffer as a result of extremes of climate.



# Sheep

## STOCKMANSHIP



Schedule 1, paragraph 1 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that:

Animals shall be cared for by a sufficient number of staff who possess the appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence.

6. The most significant single influence on the welfare of any flock is the shepherd who should develop and carry out an effective routine for continuing care.
7. All shepherds should be aware of the welfare needs of their sheep and be capable of safeguarding them under all foreseeable conditions before being given responsibility for a flock. This requires the acquisition of specific stockmanship skills which may be developed on-farm, working with an experienced person, or by following a course offered by a suitable training organisation. Wherever possible, the training should be of a type which leads to formal recognition of competence.
8. Shepherds should know the signs of good health in sheep. These include general alertness, free movement, active feeding and rumination and absence of lameness, visible wounds, abscesses or injuries.
9. Shepherds should also know the signs which indicate ill-health in sheep. These include listlessness, abnormal posture and behaviour, lameness, scouring, absence of cudding, persistent coughing or panting, scratching and frequent rubbing, rapid loss of body condition, excessive wool loss, sudden fall in milk yield and, in some circumstances, being apart from the flock.
10. The capabilities of the shepherd or shepherds in charge of the sheep is a significant factor in determining the size of a flock. The flock size should not be increased, nor should a unit be set up, unless the shepherds have the skills necessary to safeguard the welfare of every animal in their charge.
11. It is important for a farmer to ensure that enough time is available within the shepherd's normal work routine for the flock to be properly inspected and for any necessary remedial action to be taken.
12. It may be necessary to engage extra help such as experienced, competent contractors to provide extra assistance during busy periods such as lambing, shearing, routine dipping and other disease prevention treatments; or when regular staff are unavailable due to holiday or sickness.

# Sheep

## FEED AND WATER



Schedule 1, paragraphs 22-27 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270), state that:

- animals shall be fed a wholesome diet which is appropriate to their age and species and which is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health, to satisfy their nutritional needs and to promote a positive state of well-being.
- animals shall not be provided with food or liquid in a manner, nor shall such food or liquid contain any substance, which may cause them unnecessary suffering or injury.
- all animals shall have access to feed at intervals appropriate to their physiological needs (and in any case, at least once a day) - except where a veterinary surgeon acting in the exercise of his profession otherwise directs.
- all animals shall have access to a suitable water supply and be provided with an adequate supply of fresh drinking water each day or be able to satisfy their fluid intake needs by other means.
- feeding and watering equipment shall be designed, constructed, placed and maintained so that contamination of food and water and the harmful effects of competition between animals are minimised.
- no other substance, with the exception of those given for therapeutic or prophylactic purposes or for the purpose of zootechnical treatment shall be administered to animals unless it has been demonstrated by scientific studies of animal welfare or established experience that the effect of that substance is not detrimental to the health or welfare of the animals.

13. The law requires that sheep should have access to suitable feed in sufficient quantities and sufficient fresh, clean water each day. Ideally, water should be available at all times and most particularly during lactation. It is not acceptable to rely on the water content of feedstuffs, including roots.

## Sheep



14. The law requires that the diet of sheep should always be adequate to maintain full health and vigour. Feed and water should never be totally withheld for management purposes such as drying off ewes. Sudden changes in the type and quantity of feed should be avoided.
15. Sheep should be provided with fresh feed, and any which is stale or contaminated should be removed from troughs before more is added. Feed should be palatable and of good quality. It is especially important to dispose of silage which has deteriorated in storage or in the feed trough.
16. Systems involving the use of high intakes of cereal-based diets require a gradual introductory feeding period, during which sufficient roughage or a suitable high fibre concentrate should also be fed. Care should be taken to prevent individual sheep from gorging by ensuring that there is plenty of trough space available to the flock. In such systems mineral mixtures should be specifically designed to avoid urinary problems in male animals.
17. Certain substances, in particular copper, can be harmful to sheep. Compound feeds or mineral preparations which have been prepared for other species should be avoided unless the composition can be assessed as suitable for sheep. Shepherds should be aware of breed variations in susceptibility to copper poisoning.
18. Sheep farmers and shepherds should consider the state of the flock's dentition when planning culling. Sheep with poor teeth should preferably be culled. If the sheep are to be retained they should be provided with food which they can eat without difficulty and their body condition should be carefully monitored.
19. Arrangements should be made in advance to ensure that adequate supplies of suitable feed and water can be made available to sheep in emergencies, such as severe winter storms or summer drought.

# Sheep



## HEALTH

### General

Schedule 1, paragraph 2 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) requires that:

- all animals kept in husbandry systems in which their welfare depends on frequent human attention shall be thoroughly inspected at least once a day to check that they are in a state of well-being and;
- animals kept in systems other than husbandry systems in which their welfare depends on frequent human attention shall be inspected at intervals sufficient to avoid any suffering.

Schedule 1, paragraph 5 states that any animals which appear to be ill or injured

- (a) shall be cared for appropriately without delay; and
- (b) where they do not respond to care, veterinary advice shall be obtained as soon as possible.

Schedule 1, paragraph 7 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that a record shall be maintained of -

- (a) any medicinal treatment given to animals, and
- (b) the number of mortalities found on each inspection of animals carried out in accordance with the provisions in Schedule 1, paragraph 2.

Schedule 1, paragraph 8 states that the record referred to in Schedule 1, paragraph 7 shall be retained for a period of at least 3 years from the date on which the medical treatment was given, or the date of the inspection, as the case may be, and shall be made available to an authorised person when carrying out an inspection or when otherwise requested by such person.

20. Shepherds should be experienced or trained and be competent across the range of health and welfare skills which should include vaccination; drenching to control internal parasites; prevention of footrot and treatment of lame sheep; prevention and treatment of internal and external parasites including scab and fly strike; tail docking and castration. It is particularly important that shepherds have competence in the skills required at lambing time.

## Sheep



21. A written health and welfare programme for all animals should be prepared for each flock. This should cover the yearly production cycle. It should be developed with appropriate veterinary and technical advice and reviewed and updated annually. The programme should include sufficient records to assess the basic output of the flock and should address as a minimum, vaccination policy and timing, control of external and internal parasites and foot care. Pasture management should form an integral part of disease control and especially so in the case of internal parasites and footrot where total reliance on drugs is best avoided.
22. Particular attention should be paid to sheep, including rams, which are to be introduced into an established flock, since diseases can easily be spread. Such sheep should be segregated for at least 4 weeks and inspected and treated, if necessary, for diseases such as sheep scab or footrot. Newly introduced ewes should again be segregated for about 4 weeks before lambing and lambed separately, preferably after the main flock, to avoid the introduction of infectious abortion agents at this time.
23. Before introduction of rams to a flock at tupping time, ewes should be checked for fitness (especially for soundness of gait, teeth, udders and body condition) and any ewe which is sub-standard should be culled together with any known to have suffered reproductive problems in previous seasons. This is particularly important for animals expected to live under harsh conditions. Rams should also be checked for their suitability for breeding.
24. Records must be maintained (see box before paragraph 20) of any medicinal treatment given and the number of mortalities found in each inspection. Where equivalent information is required to be kept for other purposes, such as for medicine records or sheep identification legislation, these shall suffice.

## Inspection

25. The health and welfare of animals depend upon regular supervision. Shepherds should carry out inspections of the flock at regular intervals appropriate to the circumstances in which sheep are kept and pay particular attention to signs of injury, distress, illness or infestation (e.g. sheep scab, fly strike, lameness and mastitis) so that these conditions can be recognised and dealt with promptly. Frequency of inspection will depend on factors which affect sheep welfare at any particular time, e.g. housing, lambing, fly strike, adverse winter weather conditions etc.

# Sheep



## Condition Scoring

26. Sheep farmers and shepherds should be aware that the use of condition scoring can contribute significantly to good husbandry. Condition scoring is an easy technique to learn and allows the body reserves of individual sheep to be assessed quickly. The information gained enables high standards of husbandry to be achieved and can prevent a welfare problem from developing. This technique enables the identification of animals requiring special care. For example, a condition score of less than 2 for lowland sheep and 1.5 for those on the hill, in a significant number of the flock can indicate inadequate management and the need for positive steps to rectify the situation. A Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) booklet on condition scoring in sheep gives further guidance (see the Appendix).

## Lameness

27. Lameness in any animal is usually an indication of pain. Lameness in sheep is one of the most common signs of ill-health and discomfort. It has clear adverse welfare implications and also affects the performance and production of both ewes and rams. A significant percentage of sheep with chronic lameness may be indicative of poor overall welfare standards within the flock.
28. Good stockmanship, including frequent and thorough inspection along with correct diagnosis and implementation of a suitable programme of prevention and treatment, will help to reduce the incidence of lameness.
29. Lameness can originate in the feet or joints, although in adult sheep the foot is the most common site. A flock programme of foot care should be part of the written welfare programme referred to at paragraph 21. An effective footcare programme will include regular inspection of the sheeps' feet. It may also necessitate regular and careful paring, treatment of infected feet and footbathing with a suitable solution which is maintained at the manufacturer's recommended dilution and where appropriate, vaccination. If footrot is a major cause of lameness or if normal treatments are unsuccessful, veterinary advice should be sought.
30. Footparing is a skilled procedure and can damage feet if carried out incorrectly or excessively. If in doubt, specialist advice should be sought.



## Sheep



31. If a chronically lame sheep does not respond to remedial treatment it should be culled and not left to suffer. As such animals are often unable to be transported in a way which avoids further suffering they should, where necessary, be slaughtered on the farm (see paragraph 37). In addition, sheep that cannot get up without assistance or sheep that can bear weight on only three legs when standing must not be transported. Sheep that can bear weight on all four feet but are slightly lame should not be consigned to market or sent on any journey which is likely to exacerbate the injury, however slight.

A Defra booklet on lameness in sheep gives further information (see the Appendix).

### External Parasites

32. Where external parasites such as those causing scab or fly strike, ticks or lice, are likely to occur, sheep should be protected by dipping or the use of an effective preventive chemical agent. Where sheep are clinically infected with such external parasites effective treatment must be given without delay. The DARD 1998 publication on "Sheep Dipping" gives useful guidance (see the Appendix).

### Internal Parasites

33. Internal parasites should be controlled by grazing management and/or anthelmintic treatment administered at appropriate times based upon the life cycle of the parasite. Advice on appropriate timing and steps to avoid the development of anthelmintic resistant worms should be sought from a veterinary surgeon or specialist adviser.

### Casualties

34. Injured, ailing or distressed sheep should be identified and treated without delay. Where the shepherd is able to identify the cause of ill-health, he or she should take immediate remedial action. When in doubt, veterinary advice should be obtained as soon as possible.
35. Provision should be made and used when necessary, for the segregation and care of sick or injured animals. Unfit sheep (which includes infirm, diseased, ill and injured animals) should be removed from flocks.

## Sheep



36. If an unfit sheep does not respond to treatment, it should be culled or humanely killed on-farm. To cause or allow unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress by leaving a sheep to suffer is an offence.
37. In an emergency, it may be necessary to kill an animal immediately to prevent suffering. In such cases, the animal should be destroyed in a humane manner and, where possible, by a person experienced and/or trained both in the techniques and the equipment used for killing sheep.
38. If animals are killed or slaughtered on-farm other than in an emergency, the operation must be carried out using a permitted method and in accordance with current welfare at slaughter legislation.

A shepherd may humanely destroy any animal in the field in order to prevent prolonged or unnecessary suffering.

It is a general offence under the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 (As amended) (S.R. 1996 No. 558) to cause or permit any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering to any animal during slaughter or killing (Regulation 4(1)). The general offence applies in all cases, but the detailed provisions in respect of the method of slaughter or killing do not apply when an animal has to be killed immediately for emergency reasons (Regulation 13(2)).

When an unfit animal is slaughtered or killed on-farm this must be done by a permitted method. The animal could be:-

- (a) stunned by a captive bolt or electronic stunner and then bled (Regulation 14 and Schedules 5 (Part II) and 6). This operation must be carried out by a licensed slaughterman (Schedule 1); or
- (b) killed by free bullet (Regulation 15 and Schedule 5, Parts I and III). The animal should be killed with a single shot to the head.

The animal should be restrained by a manner which does not cause additional unnecessary suffering (Schedule 4).

39. An unfit sheep may only be transported if it is being taken for veterinary treatment/diagnosis or is going to the nearest available place of slaughter and then only provided it is transported in a way which is not going to cause it further suffering. Further advice can be found in a DARD booklet which gives guidance on the transport of casualty farm animals - (see the Appendix).

Particular care needs to be taken regarding stocking densities especially where sheep with heavy fleeces are being transported.



## Sheep



Articles 4 and 6(1) of the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order (Northern Ireland) 1997 (S.R. 1997 No. 346) respectively provide that:

1. A person shall not transport any animal in a way which causes or is likely to cause injury or unnecessary suffering to that animal.
2. A person shall not transport any animal unless:
  - (a) it is fit for the intended journey, and
  - (b) suitable provision has been made for its care during the journey and on arrival at the place of destination.

For these purposes an animal shall not be considered fit for its intended journey if it is ill, injured, infirm or fatigued, unless it is only slightly ill, injured, infirm or fatigued and the intended journey is not likely to cause it unnecessary suffering.

3. Notwithstanding paragraph 2 above, sheep may be transported to the nearest available place for veterinary treatment or diagnosis or to the nearest available place of slaughter if the animal is not likely to be subject to unnecessary suffering by reason of its unfitness. However, an animal so transported may not be dragged or pushed by any means, or lifted by a mechanical device, unless this is done in the presence of and under the supervision of a veterinary surgeon who is arranging for it to be transported with all practicable speed to a place for veterinary treatment.

## Dosing and Vaccination Equipment

40. Care should be taken to ensure that all equipment used in dosing, vaccination and treatment is maintained to a satisfactory standard. Equipment used for any injections should be frequently cleansed and sterilised to avoid infections. Ideally, disposable needles should be used. Dosing gun nozzles should be of a suitable size for the age of the sheep. Hazardous objects such as needles should be disposed of safely.
41. Where necessary, the shepherd should receive training in the use and maintenance of equipment used for dosing, vaccination and treatment.

# Sheep



## MANAGEMENT

### General

42. All fields and buildings should be kept clear of debris such as wire or plastic which could be harmful to sheep.
43. When sheep are outdoors in winter, and particularly when fed on root crops, they should be allowed either to run back to pasture or to a straw bedded area which gives a more comfortable lying area as well as limiting the build-up of mud or dung on the fleece. Ground conditions should be such that mudballing of the fleece does not occur. Sheep would be acceptable for slaughter without the necessity to clip or wash. Where there is no natural shelter for the sheep, artificial shelter, such as the placement of straw bales, should be provided.

Schedule 1, paragraph 17 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that:

- animals not kept in buildings shall, where necessary and possible, be given protection from adverse weather conditions, predators and risks to their health and shall, at all times, have access to a well-drained lying area.

### Marking

44. Permanent marking of sheep, such as by ear tattooing or tagging, etc should be carried out only by a skilled stockman using properly maintained instruments. Ear tags used should be suitable for use in sheep. Wherever possible marking should not be undertaken during the fly season. If marking does have to be carried out during the fly season farmers should take measures which will prevent or reduce the threat of fly strike. Where, for flock management purposes, ear marking is by notching or punching, this should be done using proprietary equipment. If horned breeds of sheep are to be marked for flock management purposes, horn branding is to be preferred.
45. Aerosols or paints used for temporary marking should be non-toxic.

# Sheep



## Handling

46. All sheep farmers should have easily operated and efficient handling pens to facilitate routine management and treatment on a size and scale to suit the flock numbers. Pens and floors should be maintained in good repair and should not have any sharp edges or projections which might injure sheep.
47. When sheep are to be transported, well-designed collecting, loading and unloading facilities should be available on the farm. It is helpful if the sheep are familiar with these handling pens in order to minimise stress levels.
48. Sheep should not be caught by the fleece alone. They should be handled or restrained by means of a hand or an arm under the neck (holding the neck wool, if necessary) with the other arm placed on or around the rear. Lifting or dragging sheep by the fleece, tail, ears, horns or legs is unacceptable. Particular care should be taken with horns which may be broken off if sheep are roughly handled.
49. Devices such as raddles, harnesses, tethers and yokes should be of suitable material and should be properly fitted and adjusted to avoid causing injury or discomfort. They should be checked regularly and should not be used for longer than necessary. Tethering by the horns is unacceptable. The practice of “langling” where the front leg is tied to the back leg to prevent sheep escaping is unacceptable and should not be used.

## Fencing and Hedges

50. Fences and hedges should be well maintained so as to avoid injury to sheep and prevent entanglement. Where any type of mesh fencing is used, particularly for horned sheep and around lambing fields, it should be checked frequently so that any animals which are caught can be released.
51. Electric fences should be designed, installed, used and maintained so that contact with them does not cause more than momentary discomfort to the sheep. Electric mesh fencing should not be used for horned sheep.

# Sheep



## Shearing

52. Every mature sheep should have its fleece removed at least once a year.
53. Shearers should be experienced, competent and have received adequate training in shearing techniques. Inexperienced shearers should be supervised by suitably competent staff. When shearing, care should be taken not to cut the skin of the sheep. Where a wound does occur, immediate treatment should be given.
54. Shearers and all contractors should clean and disinfect their equipment between flocks to minimise the risk of spreading disease.
55. Full use should be made of weather forecasts and shelter to avoid excessive cold stress to newly-shorn sheep at whatever time of year shearing is carried out.
56. Winter shearing is not a suitable practice unless the sheep are housed.
57. Sheep which were shorn and housed in winter should be turned out to grass in spring only when the fleece has regrown to 15-20 mm in length and when weather conditions are favourable. Where adequate natural shelter is not available, other means should be adopted, such as the provision of straw bales.

## Castration

58. Farmers and shepherds should consider carefully whether castration is necessary within any particular flock. Castration is unlikely to be necessary if lambs will be finished and sent to slaughter before reaching sexual maturity. The procedure should only be carried out when lambs are likely to be retained after puberty and where it is necessary to avoid welfare problems associated with the management of entire males.
59. Account should be taken not only of the pain and distress caused by castration but also the stress imposed by gathering and handling and the potential risk of infection. For very young lambs gathered in large groups there is a real risk of mis-mothering which may lead ultimately to starvation and death.

## Sheep



60. Castration should not be performed on lambs until the ewe/lamb bond has become established.
61. Castration may only be carried out in strict accordance with the law (see box below). The procedure should be performed by a competent, trained operator. Once a lamb is over three months of age, castration may only be performed by a veterinary surgeon using a suitable anaesthetic. Shepherds should only carry out surgical castration after having first considered and ruled out alternative methods in discussion with their veterinary surgeon.

1. Under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, it is an offence to castrate lambs which have reached three months of age without the use of an anaesthetic. Furthermore, the use of a rubber ring, or other device to restrict the flow of blood to the scrotum or tail, is only permitted without an anaesthetic if the device is applied during the first week of life.
2. Under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (As amended), only a veterinary surgeon may castrate a ram which has reached the age of three months.

## Tail Docking

62. Farmers and shepherds should consider carefully whether tail docking within a particular flock is necessary. Tail docking may be carried out only if failure to do so would lead to subsequent welfare problems because of dirty tails and potential fly strike. If it is considered that both tail docking and castration are necessary, thought should be given to performing both operations simultaneously so as to minimise disruption through repeated handling and the potential for mis-mothering and distress.
63. Tail docking must be carried out only in strict accordance with the law (see box below and that following paragraph 61). The procedure should be performed by a competent trained operator.

The Welfare of Livestock (Prohibited Operations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987 (S.R. 1987 No. 415) prohibit penis amputation and other penile operations, tooth-grinding, freeze dagging and short tail docking of sheep unless sufficient tail is retained to cover the vulva in the case of female sheep and the anus in the case of male sheep.

## Sheep



### Tooth Grinding

64. Tooth grinding of sheep is prohibited by law (see box following paragraph 63 on previous page).

### Electro-immobilisation, Vasectomy and Electro-ejaculation

65. The electro-immobilisation of sheep is prohibited by law. Vasectomy or electro-ejaculation may be carried out only by a veterinary surgeon.

1. Schedule 1, paragraph 30 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that a person shall not apply an electrical current to any animals for the purpose of immobilisation.
2. The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, as amended by the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (Schedule 3 Amendment) Order 1988 prohibits the performance of a vasectomy or the carrying out of electro-ejaculation by anyone other than a veterinary surgeon.

### Dehorning or Disbudding

66. Dehorning or disbudding of a sheep by a lay person is against the law, except for the trimming of ingrowing horn in certain circumstances (see box below). Horned sheep, especially rams should be regularly inspected to ensure that neither the tip nor any other part of the horn is in contact with the face.

Under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (As amended), only a veterinary surgeon may dehorn or disbud a sheep, apart from trimming the insensitive tip of an ingrowing horn which, if left untreated, could cause pain or distress.

# Sheep

## BREEDING TECHNIQUES



Schedule 1, paragraph 28 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that:

- (1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2), natural or artificial breeding or breeding procedures which cause, or are likely to cause, suffering or injury to any of the animals concerned shall not be practised.
- (2) Sub-paragraph (1) shall not preclude the use of natural or artificial breeding procedures that are likely to cause minimal or momentary suffering or injury or that might necessitate interventions which would not cause lasting injury.

Schedule 1, paragraph 29 states that no animals shall be kept for farming purposes unless it can reasonably be expected, on the basis of their genotype or phenotype, that they can be kept without detrimental effect on their health or welfare.

67. The body condition of the ewe and nutritional management prior to tupping have a marked effect on the ovulation rate and eventual litter size. The ram should also be in appropriate body condition. Farmers and shepherds should be aware of the influence of pre-mating management upon the subsequent needs of the ewe in pregnancy and plan accordingly.
68. It is possible to manipulate the time and pattern of lambing by using vasectomised rams, intra-vaginal progestagen sponges (with or without pregnant mare serum gonadotrophin (PMSG)) or administration of melatonin. If the lambing date is changed and/or litter size is increased, account should be taken of the special requirements for feed, labour and other inputs both before and at lambing time when the welfare of ewes is under particular pressure. In particular, housing or shelter should be available if lambing is to take place in adverse weather conditions.
69. Any person using artificial insemination should be trained and competent in the technique.
70. Laparoscopic artificial insemination is a surgical technique which must be carried out only by a veterinary surgeon using an anaesthetic.
71. Treatment of ewes using hormones to produce multiple embryos and subsequent embryo transfer must be carried out only by a veterinary surgeon. Embryo transfer is an act of veterinary surgery.



## Sheep

### PREGNANCY AND LAMBING



72. The nutritional management of pregnant ewes is particularly important. Both condition scoring and scanning can be of benefit.
73. Pregnant and nursing ewes should receive adequate food to ensure the development of healthy lambs and to maintain the health and bodily condition of the ewe.
74. Scanning can be a valuable aid to management. However, scanning is simply a tool to assist good husbandry not a replacement for it. The scanning procedure allows barren, single, twin and triplet bearing ewes to be managed as separate groups. A combination of scanning and condition scoring allows ewes carrying more than one lamb and thin ewes to be separated for special feeding and supervision. Equipment should be properly cleansed and disinfected between flocks.
75. Heavily pregnant ewes should be handled with care to avoid distress and injury which may precipitate premature lambing. However, if a heavily pregnant ewe requires treatment e.g. for lameness, she should receive appropriate treatment as soon as possible and not be left untreated until after lambing.
76. A large proportion of ewe mortalities occur during the period around lambing so particular skill and expertise are required at this time. Severe damage can be caused through inexperience when assisting a ewe in difficulties. Shepherds should therefore be experienced and competent before having responsibility for a flock at lambing time. Where necessary, they should receive training.
77. Shepherds should pay particular attention to cleanliness and hygiene of equipment and pens during pregnancy and lambing. Personal cleanliness is essential when assisting ewes to lamb. Attention to cleanliness and hygiene is also important in the lambing area and pens used in treating or assisting lambing ewes. Lambing pens, sufficient in number and size, should be easily accessible and on a dry, well drained site. Each pen should be provided with a hay rack, feed trough and water bucket. If the pens are outdoors their tops should be covered.
78. There may be times when even a proficient shepherd experiences difficulty in delivering a lamb single handed. In such cases assistance should be called for immediately.



## Sheep



79. Any ewe with a prolapse should be treated immediately using an appropriate technique and where necessary veterinary advice should be sought.
80. Embryotomy, the dissection and removal of a foetus which cannot be delivered naturally, should be carried out on dead lambs only. It should **never** be used to remove a live lamb.
81. Every effort should be made to prevent the build-up and spread of infection by ensuring that lambing pens are provided with adequate, clean bedding and are regularly cleansed. It is particularly important to ensure that dead lambs and afterbirths are removed and disposed of in a suitable manner without delay.

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 includes provisions making it an offence for a person knowingly to permit a carcass to remain unburied in a place to which dogs could gain access.

The Animal By-Products Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 (S.R. 2003 No. 495), provide the powers necessary to enforce the EU Animal By-Products Regulations (1774/2002) in Northern Ireland, which lay down health rules for the disposal of animal by-products not intended for human consumption. Sheep that die on-farm cannot be disposed of by burial, open burning or disposal to landfill. Fallen stock can only be disposed of by the following methods:

- incineration in an approved incineration plant;
- rendering at an approved rendering plant; or
- despatch to an approved collection centre for feeding to dogs at a recognised kennel or similar premises.

This provision applies to the disposal of stillborn lambs and foetuses, as well as to older sheep.

82. Shepherds should be able to recognise lambs in need of resuscitation and be familiar with resuscitation techniques and survival aids such as feeding by stomach tube and use of a warmer box. A Defra booklet on improving lamb survival gives further information (see the Appendix).
83. It is vital that every newly-born lamb receives colostrum from its dam, or from another source, as soon as possible and in any case within three hours of birth. Adequate supplies of colostrum should always be available for use in emergencies, when a ewe lambs with poor milk supplies.

## Sheep



84. A source of heat (e.g. a warmer box) should be available to revive weak lambs but care should be taken to avoid overheating.
85. Where lambing takes place out-of-doors some form of shelter or windbreak should be available.
86. The problem of mis-mothering, which occurs particularly during gathering, handling, transport or dipping of ewes and lambs should be reduced by keeping group size to a minimum. Identifying lambs and mothers is also beneficial, using non-toxic colour markers.
87. Wherever possible, young lambs, other than with their mothers, should not be sold at market. Arrangements for the direct transfer of orphan lambs from farm-to-farm, rather than through a market, should be encouraged in order to minimise disease risk. The law forbids the transport and the sale at market of lambs with an unhealed navel.

Article 6 of the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order (Northern Ireland) 1997, (S.R. 1997 No. 346) states that animals shall not be considered fit for transport if (*inter alia*) they are new-born animals in which the navel has not completely healed.

Article 5 of the Welfare of Animals and Poultry at Markets Order (NI) 1998, (S.R. 1998 No. 203) states that a person shall not bring or cause to be brought to a market, or permit to be exposed for sale in a market, a lamb with an unhealed navel.

Under the above Orders it is also an offence to cause or permit lambs with unhealed navels to be transported, or be brought to, or exposed for sale in, a market.

# Sheep



## ARTIFICIAL REARING

88. Artificial rearing of lambs requires close attention and high standards of supervision and stockmanship if it is to be successful. It is essential that all lambs should start with an adequate supply of colostrum.
89. All lambs should receive an adequate amount of suitable liquid feed, such as ewe milk replacer, at regular intervals each day for at least the first 4 weeks of their life.
90. From the second week of life, lambs should also have access to palatable and nutritious solid food (which may include grass) and always have access to fresh, clean water.
91. Where automatic feeding equipment is provided, lambs should be trained in its use to ensure that they regularly consume an adequate amount of food and the equipment should be checked daily to ensure that it is working properly.
92. Troughs should be kept clean and any stale feed removed. Automatic feeding systems must be well maintained and checked daily. Equipment and utensils used for liquid feeding should be thoroughly cleansed and sterilised at frequent intervals.
93. A dry bed and adequate draught-free ventilation should be provided.
94. Where necessary, arrangements should be made to supply safe supplementary heating for very young lambs.
95. Suitable accommodation should be available for sick or injured lambs. This should be separate from other livestock.
96. Until weaning, housed lambs should be kept in small groups to facilitate inspection and limit the spread of disease.
97. Where young lambs are being reared at pasture without their mothers, care should be taken to ensure that they have adequate shelter.

# Sheep



## HOUSING

### General

Schedule 1, paragraph 4 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that where any animals (other than poultry) are kept in a building:

- they shall be kept on, or have access at all times to, a lying area which is well-drained or well maintained with dry bedding; and

Schedule 1, paragraph 6 states:

- where necessary, sick or injured animals shall be isolated in suitable accommodation with, where appropriate, dry comfortable bedding.

Schedule 1, paragraph 9 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that:

- the freedom of movement of animals, having regard to their species and in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge, shall not be restricted in such a way as to cause them unnecessary suffering or injury.

Schedule 1, paragraph 10 states that where animals are continuously or regularly tethered or confined, they shall be given the space appropriate to their physiological and ethological needs in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge.

98. Winter housing of sheep can improve welfare but problems of both disease and welfare can arise when large numbers are kept together and advice should be sought on the design, construction or modification of buildings. Adequate ventilation without draughts is of particular importance, as also is the provision of sufficient trough space and lying area.
99. The greater the restriction imposed on a sheep through housing systems, the less the animal is able to use its instinctive behaviour to minimise the effects of any imposed, unfavourable conditions. Housed sheep require continuing conscientious attention by staff well trained in the nutritional and environmental needs of the sheep.

## Sheep



100. When changes are made to sheep husbandry systems which involve installing more complex or elaborate equipment than had previously been used, consideration should be given to the welfare of the animals and the need for training of the shepherd.
101. Dry, clean, comfortable conditions under foot should be provided to minimise footrot and hygiene problems. Regular provision of fresh bedding is particularly important at lambing time.
102. When first housed, sheep should be both dry and free from footrot. Sheep affected by footrot should be segregated and treated immediately in order to prevent it from becoming a flock problem.

## Ventilation

Schedule 1, paragraph 13 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that air circulation, dust levels, temperature, relative air humidity and gas concentrations shall be kept within limits which are not harmful to the animals.

103. Effective ventilation of buildings (to avoid high humidity, condensation and draughts) is essential as sheep are particularly susceptible to respiratory diseases. Properly designed ventilation will permit the free circulation of air above sheep height and avoid draughts at sheep level.

## Buildings and Equipment

104. The law sets minimum requirements for the housing of sheep.

Schedule 1, paragraphs 11 and 12 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) state that:

- Materials used for the construction of accommodation, and, in particular, for the construction of pens, cages, stalls and equipment with which the animals may come into contact, shall not be harmful to them and shall be capable of being thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- Accommodation and fittings for securing animals shall be constructed and maintained so that there are no sharp edges or protrusions likely to cause injury to them.

## Sheep



105. Internal surfaces of housing and pens should be made of materials which can be cleansed and disinfected or be easily replaced when necessary.
106. Surfaces should not be treated with paints or wood preservatives which may cause illness or death. There is a risk of lead poisoning from old paintwork especially when second-hand building materials are used.
107. All floors should be designed, constructed and maintained so as to avoid discomfort, stress or injury to the sheep. Regular maintenance is essential.
108. Solid floors should be well-drained and the sheep provided with dry bedding.
109. Newly-born and young lambs should not be put on slatted floors unless suitable bedding is also provided.
110. Water bowls and troughs should be constructed and sited so as to avoid fouling and to minimise the risk of water freezing in cold weather. They should be kept thoroughly clean and should be checked at least once daily, and more frequently in extreme conditions, to ensure that they are in working order.
111. Troughs should be designed and installed in such a way as to ensure small lambs cannot get into them and drown.
112. For sheep given concentrate feed, when all animals are fed together, it is important to have adequate trough space to avoid competition and aggression. In normal practice, approximately 30 cm of trough space is needed for hill ewes and approximately 45 cm for the larger lowland ewes. Excessive competition is detrimental to sheep welfare.
113. When feeding hay and silage *ad libitum*, trough space should normally be provided within the range 10-12 cm per ewe, dependent upon size. Racks and troughs should be positioned and designed to avoid injury, discomfort and damage to sheep.

# Sheep

## Lighting

114. The law requires that fixed or portable lighting be available so that sheep kept in buildings can be thoroughly inspected at any time.

Schedule 1, paragraph 3 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270), requires that where animals are kept in a building adequate lighting (whether fixed or portable) shall be available to enable them to be thoroughly inspected at any time.

Schedule 1, paragraphs 14-16 state that:

- animals kept in buildings shall not be kept in permanent darkness.
- where the natural light available in a building is insufficient to meet the physiological and ethological needs of any animals being kept in it then appropriate artificial lighting shall be provided.
- animals kept in buildings shall not be kept without an appropriate period of rest from artificial lighting.

115. Throughout the hours of daylight the level of indoor lighting, natural or artificial, should be such that all housed sheep can be seen clearly by the shepherd.





# Sheep

## Space Allowances

116. The space allowance and group size for housed sheep should be determined according to age, size and class of livestock. Some examples of current good practice, with adequate ventilation and well bedded on straw indoors, are set out below.

### Space

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (a) Lowland ewes (60-90kg liveweight).                                  | 1.2-1.4m <sup>2</sup> floor space per ewe during pregnancy. |
| (b) Lowland ewes after lambing with lambs at foot up to 6 weeks of age. | 2.0-2.2m <sup>2</sup> floor space per ewe and lambs.        |
| (c) Hill ewes (45-65kg liveweight).                                     | 1.0-1.2m <sup>2</sup> floor space per ewe during pregnancy. |
| (d) Hill ewes after lambing, with lambs at foot, up to 6 weeks of age.  | 1.8-2.0m <sup>2</sup> floor space per ewe and lambs.        |
| (e) Lambs up to 12 weeks old.   | 0.5-0.6m <sup>2</sup> floor space per lamb.                 |
| (f) Lambs and sheep 12 weeks to 12 months old.                          | 0.75-0.9m <sup>2</sup> floor space per lamb/sheep           |
| (g) Rams.   | 1.5-2.0m <sup>2</sup>                                       |

### Shorn Sheep

The space allowances may be reduced by 10% for winter shorn sheep. However no corresponding reduction should be made in respect of the amount of trough space allocated - see paragraphs 112 and 113 on page 29.

### Group Size

Where possible pregnant ewes should be kept in groups of less than 50 to allow for better individual recognition and attention at lambing time.





## Sheep



### Mechanical Equipment and Services

Schedule 1, paragraph 18 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. 2000 No. 270) states that all automated or mechanical equipment essential for the health and well-being of the animals shall be inspected at least once a day to check there is no defect in it and that no parts of the equipment have become seriously worn.

Schedule 1, paragraph 19 states that where defects in automated or mechanical equipment of the type referred to in paragraph 18 of Schedule 1 are discovered, these shall be rectified immediately, or if this is impossible, appropriate steps shall be taken to safeguard the health and well-being of the animals pending the rectification of such defects including the use of alternative methods of feeding and watering and methods of providing and maintaining a satisfactory environment.

On artificial ventilation systems, Schedule 1, paragraph 20 states that where the health and well-being of the animals is dependent on such a system -

- (a) provision shall be made for an appropriate back-up system to guarantee sufficient air renewal to preserve the health and well-being of the animals in the event of failure of the system; and
- (b) an alarm system (which will operate even if the principal electricity supply to it has failed) shall be provided to give warning of any failure of the system.

Schedule 1, paragraph 21 states that the back-up system referred to in paragraph 20(a) of Schedule 1 shall be thoroughly inspected and the alarm system referred to in paragraph 20(b) of Schedule 1 shall be tested at least once every seven days in order to check that there is no defect in the system and, if any defect is found (whether when the system is inspected or tested in accordance with this paragraph or at any other time) it shall be rectified immediately.

- 117. All equipment and services including water bowls and troughs, ventilating fans, heating and lighting units, milking machines, fire extinguishers and alarm systems should be cleaned and inspected regularly and kept in good working order.
- 118. The law (see box above) requires all automatic equipment used in intensive systems to be thoroughly inspected by the shepherd, or other competent person, not less than once each day to check that there is no defect. Any defect must be rectified immediately.
- 119. All electrical installations at mains voltage should be inaccessible to sheep, well insulated, safeguarded from rodents and properly earthed.

## Sheep



### Fire and Other Emergency Precautions

120. There should be plans in place to deal with emergencies on the farm, such as fire, flood or disruption of supplies. The owner should make sure that all the staff are familiar with the appropriate emergency action. More information is available in the Defra booklets, “Emergencies on Livestock Farms” and “Farm Fires: protecting farm animal welfare” (see the Appendix).
121. It is important that shepherds get advice about design when building or modifying a building. Shepherds need to be able to release and evacuate livestock quickly if there is an emergency. Consideration should be given to installing fire alarms that can be heard and responded to at any time of day or night.
122. If sheep are housed, a knowledge of fire precautions by the farmer and all staff should be a priority.
123. Expert advice on all fire precautions can be obtained from local fire officers in Fire Brigade Area Command Headquarters.

# Sheep

## HAZARDS



124. To minimise the risk of sheep being trapped in snow or being unable to gain shelter, care should be taken in siting shelters, shelter belts and fences.
125. As far as practicable, sheep should be prevented from gathering in places where they may be buried by snow; where possible they should be allowed to move naturally or be shepherded into safer areas.
126. All sheep should be removed from areas which are in imminent danger of flooding.
127. Young lambs should be protected, as far as possible, from hazards such as open drains and predators.
128. Any dog is a potential hazard to sheep and should be kept under control on agricultural land. Well-trained sheepdogs, however, can greatly facilitate gathering and handling, particularly under extensive conditions. They should be trained so that they do not grip sheep. Sheepdogs should be regularly wormed to eliminate endoparasites.

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 lays down measures for the protection of livestock against dogs.

# Sheep



## MILK SHEEP

### Management

129. Milk sheep flocks are in many cases subjected to a more intensive system of husbandry than a conventional flock and will require especially vigilant stockmanship to ensure that their health and welfare are maintained.
130. Shepherds should be aware of specific problems relevant to milk sheep and the ways in which these may be avoided.
131. Some breeds of milk sheep appear to be especially susceptible to foot problems and these can be exacerbated by the husbandry methods under which the sheep are kept. The roadway, entrances and exits to buildings and fields should be well maintained and kept as clean as possible.
132. Routine treatments to prevent foot problems should be adopted but care should be taken in the observance of withdrawal periods for any medicines used, particularly during lactation. Efforts to combat footrot during the drying-off period are particularly important.
133. Milk sheep are naturally prolific and require particular attention to the level of nutrition provided during pregnancy and lactation.

### Milking Practices

134. Special attention should be paid to milking techniques, the adjustment of milking equipment and dairy hygiene. Milking should take place at least daily, on a regular basis, ensuring that ewes are not left with unrelieved, distended udders.
135. Before and after milking, hygiene measures should be adopted to reduce the spread of diseases of the mammary gland.
136. Good milking practices include careful handling, examination of foremilk and the avoidance of excessive stripping.

### Milking Parlours and Equipment

137. Pens, ramps, milking parlours and milking equipment should be properly designed, constructed and maintained to prevent injury and distress.
138. It is essential to ensure that milking machines are functioning correctly by carrying out proper maintenance and adjustment of vacuum levels, pulsation rates and ratios, taking account of the manufacturers' recommendations.

# Sheep

## APPENDIX

### Useful Publications

#### A. DARD Publications

Guidance on the Transport of Casualty Farm Animals (ISBN 1 85527 1761)

Guidance on The Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order (Northern Ireland) 1997

The above are available free of charge from Divisional Veterinary Offices.  
(See inside back cover).

Sheep Dipping - available from Animal Health & Welfare Division (028 9052 4658)

#### B. Defra Publications:

##### PB No. Title

1147	Emergencies on Livestock Farms
2111	Heat Stress in Sheep
1149	Lameness in Sheep
2072	Improving Lamb Survival
1875	Condition Scoring of Sheep
9326	Farm Fires: Protecting Farm Animal Welfare

Copies of the above Defra publications can be obtained, free of charge, from:

**Defra Publications**

**Admail 6000**

**London**

**SW1A 2XX**

Telephone orders or enquiries : 0845 955 6000

E-mail: [defra@iforcegroup.com](mailto:defra@iforcegroup.com)

Website: <http://www.defra.gov.uk>

Copies of the legislation quoted in the Code are available from:

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### **Further Information or Advice**

If you would like any more information or advice about this Code, please contact your local Divisional Veterinary Office or DARD's Animal Welfare and Trade Branch on Tel. No. 028 9052 5272

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Revised August 2005

ISBN 1 85527 790 5



Department of  
**Agriculture and  
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