

Sheep and Goat Handling Factsheet- 2023 Sheep & Goat Symposium

Some things to note about sheep and goat behavior and handling:

- The best way to handle livestock is to work in harmony with their natural behavior.
- Livestock have excellent peripheral (wide angle) vision. However, they don't see directly in front of themselves very well.
- They have excellent distant vision, though they may have difficulty judging distances – for example a gate that is not very far open does not look like an opening.
- Livestock prefer to move towards light and do not like to enter dark buildings or trailers.
- Livestock have a keen sense of hearing.
- Ruminants have a natural herding instinct. They become distressed and agitated if they are separated from the rest of the herd.
- They like to follow the leader. They move in a circle around the pen or handler.
- They are easily distracted by noises or sudden movements.
- Shadows will cause livestock to balk.
- They are creatures of habit and will remember bad experiences for up to a year.

Keep it Simple -

- Crowd into the corner with panels, wade in, wear or hang the things you need.
- Panels can be fancy or not (be careful – many bar gates have spaces that are too big)
 - Tie top and bottom
 - Keep the sheep close together
 - Mark those done with chalk or paint or crayon
 - A few well-placed staples in the wall will go a long way to keeping things stable
 - Avoid water tank or other things they can step in.
 - Avoid nails or other things sticking out
 - Good lighting helps

Things to Look For if you Purchase Handling Systems or Parts:

- Fold down sides – at least on a couple panels, will be easier on your back
- Anti-back-up gates and or guillotine gates (be sure you have the height for it)
- Ways to hook together
- Sort gate
- Adjustable width?
- Good Paint

Some common parts:

- Tub or Funnel (funnel should have one straight side and one on an angle)
- Swing gate
- Guillotine gates – these require height
- Sort gate, stanchion
- Tilt table
- Scale
- Footbath

Some things to consider if you make your own:

- Raised or floor level? They like to go uphill. Provide good traction
- How wide? Narrower than you think.
- How high? Jumping out can be a problem.
- How long? Room for many sheep in a row is good.
- Where to put it
 - Make it in sections so you can move it
 - Remember it takes up space
 - Room to sort at the end or put the scale, etc.
- Collection area and feeder funnel (with one straight side) or tub, are horns a problem?
- Light is important!!
 - For you to see what you are doing
 - For sheep/goats to go towards
 - Solid versus slats
 - Remember you might not want all the sheep at once (might need extra pens and might not want the sheep you are working to see the other sheep)

Training Your sheep to Use your chute:

- Put it in a spot they must go through to get outside.

Some other Simple Ideas

- Out in the pasture....
 - Metal posts and hog panels (use extra posts)
 - Curved hog panel to funnel them in
- Use existing alley ways and mangers in old barns continued ->

- Use your chute panels to make a box with a door on opposite sides, bring in 10 ewes, do what you have to do and kick them out the other side, bring in 10 more.
- A collar and a piece of rope, tie up close to post, trim feet like a horse, vaccinate, give treat (graham cracker) and let go.

Some plans for building your own sheep and goat things.

If you like to build things out of wood there are some great old plans available.

These are the plans from North Dakota State:

<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension-aben/buildingplans/sheep>

These are oldies from the Canadian Plan Service. I have made some things and used them for measurements. You have to go in and click on sheep (no goat section) and download the plans and then go through trying to find the one you want. They are numbered, not named. There are two for handling – one that is a working chute (M-4812) and one that is a whole layout (M-4811L)

<https://csbe-scgab.ca/publications/canada-plan-service-archive>

This is the Midwest Plan Service site which has a book of things you can build including handling items like a loading chute. It also has a wool bag stand, feeders, and more.

<https://www.mwps.iastate.edu/search/node/sheep>

Colorado State has some good plans:

https://extension.colostate.edu/publications-2/blueprints-and-housingequipment-plans/blueprints-sheep-equipment-and-housing-plans/http://ablamb.ca/producer_mgmt/Setting-It-Up-Sheep-Infrastructure/6-Handling-Systems/A-Handling/6-6-Planning-Your-Sheep-Handling-Facility.pdf

This is a complete 92 page guide to everything you could imagine about a sheep handling system. Worth looking through online for ideas and safety reminders.

<https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2020/A-Guide-to-Designing-a-Sheep-Handling-Unit.pdf>

Here are a few of the places that sell sheep handling equipment. Some have helpful videos.

Shepherds Mate – a great video on their portable handling equipment. It comes from Ireland but they ship to the USA.

<https://shepherdsmate.com/>

Sydell is the classic blue panels. Sometimes a few solid sided panels with doors are very useful whether you use them as a chute or a square. They have fold down panels, too.

<https://sydell.com/>

Premier has parts designed with sheep in mind.

<https://www.premier1supplies.com/c/equipment/handling-equipment>

There are more online! Google Sheep Handling