
The IWTO Guidelines for Wool Sheep Welfare

A concise summation of good
practice principles for ethical
wool sheep production

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Foreword - IWTO President

Wool is increasingly seen by caring consumers as a sustainable lifestyle choice for fashion and interiors.

In 2010 HRH The Prince of Wales launched the Campaign for Wool with the purpose of renewing interest in and creating a greater awareness of wool's environmental credentials. Of equal importance to the Campaign is the preservation of sustainable practices on farms for the benefit of the rural community.

Fashion and Retail now, as a matter of course, are asking textile manufacturers ever more searching questions about provenance, origin and sustainability. Animal welfare and caring for the land are increasingly important elements in areas relating to Corporate Social Responsibility.

The IWTO is the recognised global authority for manufacturing standards in the wool textile industry and we are fully aware we are working in an area where sustainable practices need to be transparent at all stages in the pipeline. Animal welfare is very much a part of this process.

I was delighted that so many grower countries contributed to the preparation of this valuable document which will be of significant assistance to spinners and weavers working closely with downstream manufacturers in the global market.

The route from farm to fashion crosses many borders where standards of manufacturing excellence and Corporate Social Responsibility need to respond to the expectations of the increasingly vigilant consumers.

Our intent is that these guidelines provide a ready resource for anyone interested in the applicable standards for wool sheep production globally, and for those interested in development or refinement of individual country codes. It will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

Peter Ackroyd
President
International Wool Textile Organisation (IWTO)



Acknowledgements

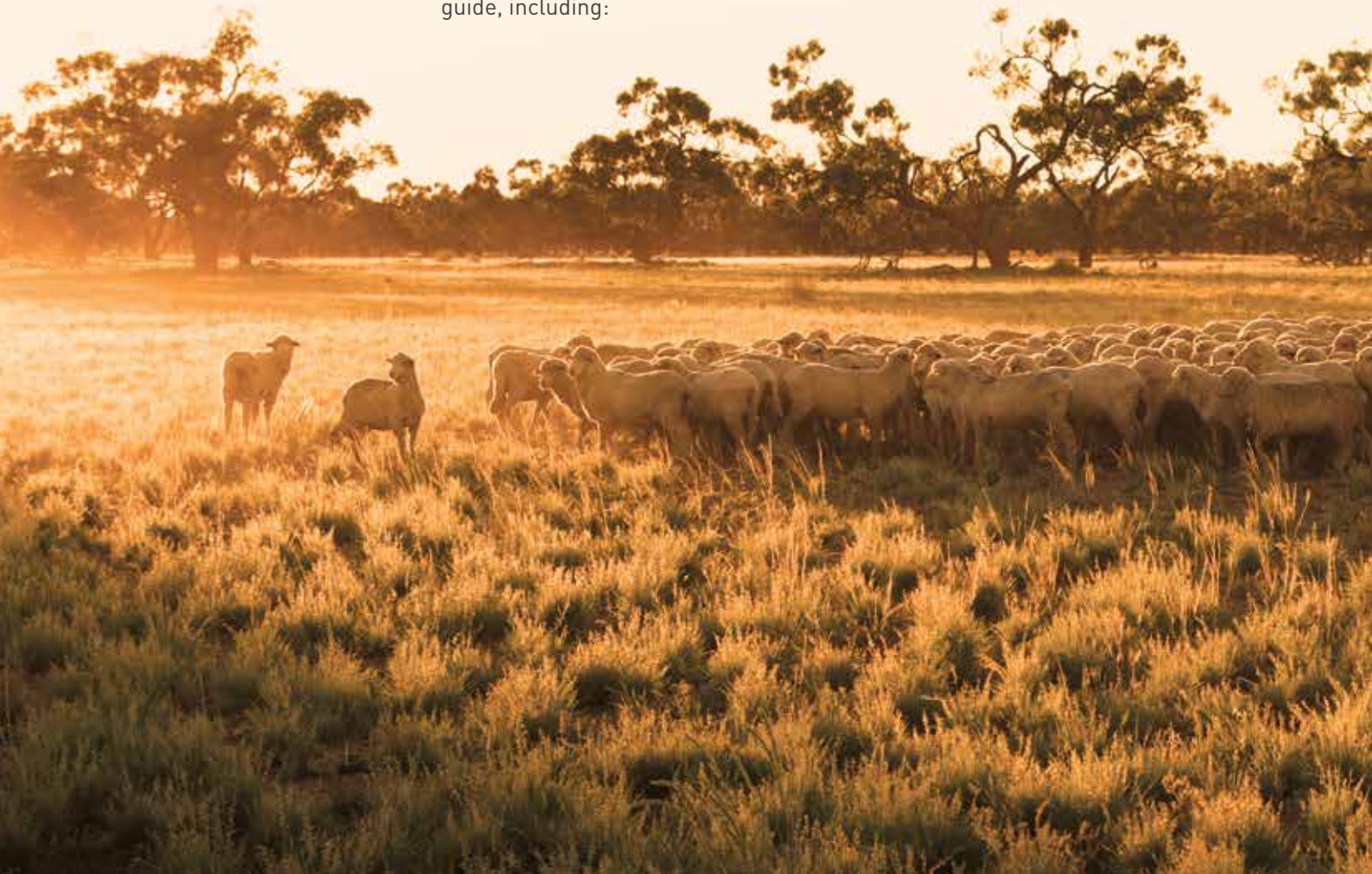
The IWTO Guide to Wool Sheep Welfare has been developed through a consultative process involving representatives of individual grower countries and technical experts in the fields of animal welfare and veterinary science, through the IWTO Sustainable Practices Working Group.

The objective of this guide is to clearly define and widely promote animal welfare practices in wool production, relevant to the wide diversity of production environments around the globe.

While specifically relevant to the global wool sheep production industry, these good welfare practices are closely aligned with the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

The journey has been a long one – the global discussion process commenced within IWTO in 2004, leading to a decision taken by IWTO grower member countries in May 2012 to establish a set of guidelines for wool sheep welfare. This necessitated a global consultation process, which involved representatives from all major wool producer nations around the globe, including USA, UK, Uruguay, Argentina, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.

In particular, IWTO hereby acknowledges some particular contributors to this guide, including:



- Louis de Beer (South Africa)
- Harry Prinsloo (South Africa)
- Leon de Beer (South Africa)
- Elisabeth van Delden (IWTO)
- Ian Hartley (United Kingdom)
- David Maslen (New Zealand)
- Ignacio Abella (Uruguay)
- Jo Hall (Australia)
- Geoff Fiskén (Australia)
- Colin Trengove (Australia)
- Geoff Lindon (Australia)
- Paul Swan (Australia)

Given the continual evolution of technology and welfare standards, these guidelines will be subject to periodic review and revision.

Geoff Kingwill

Chair

IWTO Sustainable Practices Working Group

May 2013



Introduction

Technically, animal welfare reflects the state of well-being of the animal, in coping with the environment in which it exists. In livestock farming systems, animal welfare primarily reflects the standard of animal husbandry practiced – the provision of adequate nutrition and a suitable environment (including farm facilities) to enable the animal to live healthily, express innate behaviours and not suffer from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress. Importantly, good animal welfare is associated with positive productivity outcomes.

In recent decades, there has been a rapid evolution of what constitutes good animal welfare practice, reflecting rising societal awareness of the importance of animal welfare. Originating in the UK from the 1960's, the so-called '5 Freedoms' started out as a list of required provisions for farmed animal well-being¹. These now underpin modern welfare standards and guidelines such as Article 7 of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code², the European Convention for the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes³, and New Zealand's Animal Welfare Act⁴.

Over the last 5 decades, individual country and multilateral frameworks for codifying acceptable welfare practices have been developed, which increasingly permeate trade policy arena. As an example of this evolution, the OIE in 2005 extended its remit to include animal welfare as a component of animal health⁵, and in 2013, OIE is well progressed toward development with ISO of international certification standards for the welfare of food producing animals⁶.

While the global wool textile industry takes seriously its obligations in this area, there are some significant logistical challenges in promulgating a harmonised global code or standard for wool sheep welfare:

- Wool production is extremely disaggregated – the annual global production of around 2 million tons of greasy wool is derived from over 1 billion sheep, located across some 200,000 major and several million minor wool production enterprises, in more than 100 countries.
- In a legal sense, each country has sovereign responsibility for its laws and regulations pertaining to animal welfare practices, and this sovereign responsibility may be devolved to states and territories within countries (such as is the case in Australia), or individual countries within a regional aggregation such as the European Union. Whilst the position of OIE Animal Welfare Standards within the multilateral trade legislative framework remains the subject of debate, by their process of development and adoption there is no doubt that the international community expects OIE member countries to implement OIE animal welfare standards.

For these reasons, IWTO recognises the importance of communicating a global stance on what constitutes good wool sheep welfare practices – both to enable communication of a global industry perspective on these issues, and to provide a resource for members to utilise in developing their own frameworks, where needed.

1. Farm Animal Welfare Council, "Five Freedoms", <http://www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms.htm> (accessed 2nd April 2013)

2. OIE (2013), http://www.oie.int/index.php?id=169&L=0&htmfile=chapitre_1.7.1.htm (accessed 2nd April 2013)

3. Council of Europe, http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/animal_welfare/112070_en.htm

4. New Zealand Government, "Animal Welfare Act 1999", <http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/legislation/animal-welfare-act/index.htm>

5. OIE (2013), <http://www.oie.int/en/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-key-themes/>, (accessed 2nd April 2013)

6. "Animal Welfare in the Food Chain", Draft N8, OIE Working Group 16/ISO Technical Committee 34

1

Definition Of Animal Welfare And The 5 Freedoms

The OIE Terrestrial Code⁷ defines animal welfare as: “*how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behavior, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress*”.

The same article (7.1.1) goes further to suggest that: “*Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and appropriate veterinary treatment, shelter, management and nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter or killing. Animal welfare refers to the state of the animal; the treatment that an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment*”

In establishment of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code, the OIE acknowledges the guidance provided by the internationally recognized 5 freedoms⁸:

1. **Freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition** – through ready access to fresh water and a diet sufficient to maintain full health and vigour;
2. **Freedom from discomfort** – through provision of an appropriately sheltered and comfortable environment
3. **Freedom from pain, injury and disease** – by prevention, or rapid diagnosis and treatment
4. **Freedom to express normal patterns of behavior** – through provision of sufficient space, suitable facilities, and company of the animal’s own kind
5. **Freedom from fear and distress** – ensuring conditions and treatments imposed avoid mental suffering

IWTO also recognises the value of the 5 Freedoms in a guidance sense, and consistent with the views of others, that these freedoms represent ‘ideal’ states, rather than specific standards for acceptable welfare. For this reason, the principles detailed below for sheep production practice reflect the 5 Freedoms in a general sense and more specifically, the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

7. OIE (2013), Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Article 7.1.1

8. Farm Animal Welfare Council, “Five Freedoms”, <http://www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms.htm> (accessed 2nd April 2013)

9. FAO (2010), “Legislative and regulatory options for animal welfare”, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1907e/i1907e01.pdf> (accessed 2nd April 2013)

2

IWTO Principles For Sheep Welfare

Sheep are managed in environments that vary from extensive rangelands to intensively housed systems, and where housing may be practiced at some times of the year (for example, during periods of adverse seasonal conditions).

Reflecting the global diversity of sheep production environments, adherence to good animal husbandry principles is essential to meet the welfare requirements of animals, whatever the environment.

Good husbandry principles that also meet the basic physiological and behavioural needs of sheep include:

NUTRITION

Sheep should be provided access to food and water appropriate to their physiological state, thus maintaining health and vigour, and avoiding prolonged hunger, malnutrition and thirst.

ENVIRONMENT

Sheep should be kept in an environment that provides the conditions and facilities needed for health, comfort and normal behaviour including movement, rest and socialisation. This is usually best achieved in conditions that closely resemble the natural environment, with appropriate shade, shelter and reasonable prevention of predation.

HEALTH

A positive, proactive, preventative approach to planning of health care should be considered. Where possible, sheep should be selected, bred and managed to maintain health and physical fitness, avoiding pain, injury and disease and treated promptly when they occur.

BEHAVIOUR

Sheep should be able to express innate, non-harmful behaviours, including social behaviour, while conditions that cause harmful or abnormal behaviour should be avoided or corrected.

HANDLING

Sheep should be managed to avoid fear and distress, by appropriate design of facilities, careful treatment during handling and transport (where transport is necessary), and use of humane methods for slaughter.

In the following section, each of these 5 principal areas is detailed.

2.1 Nutrition

The OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code states that:

“ *Animals should have access to sufficient feed and water, suited to the animals’ age and needs, to maintain normal health and productivity and to prevent prolonged hunger, thirst, malnutrition or dehydration.* ”¹⁰

Extending this to specific wool production practice guidelines:

1. Sheep should have reasonable access to feed and water appropriate to their age and needs.
2. If sufficient feed and water cannot be provided to sheep, options should be considered to relocate, sell, or humanely dispose of the sheep before their welfare is adversely affected.
3. Self-feeders and watering points should be checked regularly to ensure feed and water quality and quantity is maintained.
4. Access to contaminated and spoilt feed, toxic plants and harmful substances should be avoided.
5. Digestive problems should be prevented by gradually introducing sheep to a change of diet.

10. OIE (2012) Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Article 7.1.4 (6)



2.2 Environment

The OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code states that:

“ .. the physical environment should allow comfortable resting, safe and comfortable movement including normal postural changes, and the opportunity to perform types of natural behaviour that animals are motivated to perform.

The physical environment, including the substrate (walking surface, resting surface, etc.), should be suited to the species so as to minimise risk of injury and transmission of diseases or parasites to animals.

Air quality, temperature and humidity in confined spaces should support good animal health and not be aversive to animals. Where extreme conditions occur, the animals should not be prevented from using their natural methods of thermo-regulation”¹¹

Extending this to wool production practice guidelines, the general principal is that sheep should be managed to minimise the impact of threats to their lifetime welfare, including extremes of weather, natural disasters, disease, injury and predation. Specifically:

1. Sheep should be purpose bred and effectively managed so as to enable a high level of physical adaptation to the production environment and to minimise undue stress;
2. Sheep should be inspected at intervals appropriate to risks to their welfare;
3. Consideration should be given to the provision of shelter in the absence of natural protection;
4. When sheep are confined for extended periods, they should:
 - a. have effective ventilation;
 - b. be housed in social groups; and
 - c. have non-slip, non-abrasive and free-draining floor surfaces that avoid the accumulation of faeces and urine likely compromise their welfare;
5. Handling facilities should be free from protrusions and obstacles that may cause injury.
6. Measures should be put in place to prevent sheep being harmed or killed by predators.

11. OIE (2012), Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Article 7.1.4 (2, 3, and 5)

2.3 Health

The OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code states that:

“ *Diseases and parasites should be prevented and controlled as much as possible through good management practices. Animals with serious health problems should be isolated and treated promptly or killed humanely if treatment is not feasible or recovery is unlikely.*

Where painful procedures cannot be avoided, the resulting pain should be managed to the extent that available methods allow ”¹²

Extending this to specific wool production practice guidelines:

1. As part of a preventative approach to managing the health aspects of sheep welfare, a health management plan should be designed and implemented under guidance from qualified advisors;
2. Within the health management plans, disease prevention strategies should include vaccination against relevant diseases, monitoring and control of internal and external parasites, and selection toward genetic resistance and resilience to parasites and diseases.
3. Sheep should be inspected regularly, and unexplained disease and deaths should be investigated to formulate appropriate remedial and preventive actions;
4. Appropriate treatment for sick, injured or diseased sheep should be undertaken at the first reasonable opportunity, and sheep suffering that cannot be reasonably treated should be humanely euthanased at the first reasonable opportunity.
5. Surgical procedures should be avoided wherever possible and should only be performed where there is a positive health or welfare benefit for the animal. Where surgical procedures cannot be avoided, the resulting pain should be minimised by selection of the most appropriate method for the age of the animal, and the use of anaesthesia and analgesia, where practicable. Genetic, technological, and management interventions should be sought and applied to remove the need for surgical procedures.
6. Good hygiene practices should be practiced in relation to facilities, hands, handling and instruments.
7. Sheep that grow and retain long wool should be shorn at least annually.

12. OIE (2012), Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Article 7.1.4 (7, 8)

2.4 Behaviour

The OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code specifies that:

“ *Social grouping of animals should be managed to allow positive social behaviour and minimise injury, distress and chronic fear* ”¹³

Extending this to wool production practice guidelines, in general sheep should be able to express normal behaviours free from undue stress or constraint:

1. Sheep confined for extended periods should be able to turn around, see, hear, smell and touch neighbouring sheep or have a companion if individually penned;
2. Trough space should be adequate to allow sufficient daily intake of feed and water by all sheep, including shy feeders and to minimise bullying;
3. Sufficient space should be allowed for all sheep to lie on their sternums at the same time in an intensive production system;
4. Sheep should be restrained for the minimum time necessary, and tethered sheep should be able to exercise daily.

13. OIE (2012), Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Article 7.1.4 (4)



2.5 Handling

The OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code specifies that:

“ *The handling of animals should foster a positive relationship between humans and animals and should not cause injury, panic, lasting fear or avoidable stress* ”

and;

“ *Owners and handlers should have sufficient skill and knowledge to ensure that animals are treated in accordance with these [OIE] principles* ”¹⁴

Extending this to specific wool production practice guidelines:

1. Handling practices should be appropriate and minimise risk to the welfare of sheep:
 - a. handling should be minimised during extreme weather;
 - b. extra care should be taken when handling sheep with special needs — for example, young lambs, heavily pregnant ewes, lame sheep and rams;
 - c. sheep should be returned to feed and water as soon as possible after handling;
2. Overcrowding of sheep in pens or yards and on transport vehicles should be avoided. Precautions should be taken to prevent smothering - especially for lambs and weaners.
3. Handling facilities should be appropriate to minimise risks to sheep welfare.
4. The use of dogs and handling aids should be limited to the minimum needed to complete the task. When dogs are used, they should be effectively trained and managed.
5. In the interests of the livestock and all involved in the farm enterprise, farm staff involved in management of livestock should be suitably proficient in their animal management practices.

14. OIE (2012) Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Article 7.1.4(9, 10)



3

Glossary Of Terms

ACCESS TO FEED AND WATER

A reasonable opportunity for sheep to be able to drink water of a suitable quality and quantity to maintain their hydration, and consume a sufficient quality and quantity of feed to maintain appropriate levels of health and vigour.

ANIMAL WELFARE

The state of an animal and how well it is coping with the conditions in which it lives.

BULLYING FEEDER

A sheep who attempts to prevent other sheep from feeding in a dominance display.

EMERGENCY

Where animal welfare or human safety may otherwise be compromised.

EXTENSIVE GRASSLAND

Free-range production that relies on shrubland, rangeland production systems and/or pastures for providing nutrition for sheep.

EXTREMES OF WEATHER

Temperature and climatic conditions (e.g. rain, hail, snow, wind, humidity and heat) that — individually or in combination — are likely to predispose sheep to heat or cold stress.

FACILITIES

Fences, yards, sheds, raceways, feed and water troughs, portable yards, ramps and equipment, including lamb-marking cradles, dips, sprays and jetting races.

HUSBANDRY

The practice of breeding and raising livestock.

INSPECT

The visual check of the health and welfare of sheep on an individual or mob basis.

INTENSIVE PRODUCTION SYSTEMS

An operation where sheep are confined for a period longer than four weeks for the purposes of wool, meat or milk production, and are dependent on the daily supply of feed and or water provided by human or mechanical means.

Does not include rams housed for breeding or stud sheep in preparation for showing.

IWTO

International Wool Textile Organisation.

LAMB MARKING

A set of procedures commonly done at the same time. May include earmarking, ear tagging, vaccination, drenching, tail docking and castration of lambs.

LIE

Sheep are able to rest on their sternums without restriction (or contact with other sheep or structure).

OIE

The World Organisation for Animal Health (historically the Office International des Epizooties formed in 1924).

OIE TERRESTRIAL CODE

Sets out standards for animal health and welfare and veterinary public health worldwide.

PAIN RELIEF

The administration of drugs that reduce the intensity and duration of a pain response.

PREDATION

A biological interaction where the predator feeds on its prey.

SELF FEEDERS

A container that enables sheep to access supplementary food, such as grains, without direct human intervention. These can either be manual or mechanical and used in extensive or intensive production systems.

SHEEP

Ovis aries and other members of the genus *Ovis*.

SHOULD

Make all reasonable efforts.

SHY FEEDER

Sheep in a feedlot that do not eat and drink sufficiently.

SURGICAL PROCEDURE

A procedure requiring surgery that is conducted to improve the long term welfare of a sheep. Usually conducted during lamb marking.

TETHERED

A rope, chain, or similar restraint for holding a sheep in place, allowing a short radius in which it can move about.

TROUGH

A container for animal feed or water.

VENTILATION

Natural or mechanically induced air movement sufficient to provide oxygen and remove excessive heat load and noxious gases.

WEANER

An adolescent sheep that no longer requires liquid feed.

WETHER

A castrated male sheep.



4

Links To Individual Country Sheep Welfare Codes

COUNTRY	INSTRUMENT TYPE	DETAIL
AUSTRALIA	Standards and Guidelines	<p>The draft 'Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Sheep' has been developed to provide nationally consistent rules for sheep care and management across Australia. These are undergoing the public consultation phase, prior to finalization.</p> <p>http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/sheep</p>
NEW ZEALAND	Code of welfare	<p>The NZ Animal Welfare (Sheep and Beef Cattle) Code of Welfare 2010 has been developed to provide the minimum standards of compliance with the NZ Animal Welfare Act 1999.</p> <p>http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/animal-welfare/codes/sheep-beef-cattle</p>
SOUTH AFRICA	Best Practice Reference Manual	<p>The National Woolgrowers Association of South Africa developed the Best Practice Reference Manual for wool sheep farming in South Africa.</p> <p>http://www.capewools.co.za/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=275&Itemid=92</p>
UNITED KINGDOM	UK Animal Welfare Act; Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007, 2010.	<p>The UK Animal Welfare Act (2006) established the legislative framework surrounding animal welfare in UK.</p> <p>Specific regulations pertaining to livestock were defined in 'The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007', which was updated in 2010.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/sheep-and-goat-welfare http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2007/2078/introduction/made</p>

