

# **MANAGEMENT AND WELFARE OF SHEEP ON CONVENTIONAL AND ORGANIC SHEEP FARMS IN ICELAND**

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- Changes in winter management
- Housing and feeding
- Sheep welfare
- The five freedoms
- Free-range grazing in summer
- Quality control scheme
- Conventional versus organic flocks
- Floor space
- Floor type
- Outdoor access in winter

## **THE FIVE FREEDOMS**

- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease
- Freedom to express normal behaviour
- Freedom from fear and distress

## **WINTER MANAGEMENT**

- After free-range grazing from June – October sheep in Iceland are normally housed from November until after lambing in May.
- Seaweed foraging is still practiced on a few farms in early winter but generally winter grazing has been abandoned.
- Feeding is mainly with round-bale silage of a high dry matter content, often supplemented with small amounts of fishmeal.
- Self-feeding arrangements are becoming widespread.
- Most of the sheep are shorn in November and again in February – March.

## **MANAGEMENT AND WELFARE MONITORING SYSTEM**

- Cooperation between the Farmers Association of Iceland, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Chief Veterinary Officer.
- Animal numbers and silage / hay supplies are recorded in November.
- Farm Animal Inspectors employed by the local authorities visit all sheep owners in March or April checking sheep numbers, feed supplies, housing facilities, welfare and the condition of the animals.
- The majority of Icelandic sheep farmers take part in a voluntary quality control scheme where special considerations are given to management and welfare.

## CONVENTIONAL / ORGANIC FLOCKS IN ICELAND

	<b>Conventional</b>	<b>Organic</b>
<b>Floor space</b>	0.7 m <sup>2</sup> per adult sheep	1.0 m <sup>2</sup> per adult sheep
<b>Floor type</b>	Mainly slats (wooden, metal, concrete, plastic). Seldom straw bedding	Straw bedding of at least half the area
<b>Outdoor access</b>	No requirements, the sheep may stay indoors throughout the winter (November-May)	Daily, throughout the winter, weather permitting

### CONCLUSIONS

- The standard of management and welfare is generally high in Icelandic sheep flocks.
- Growing economic pressure, larger flock size, poor profitability and part-time sheep keeping must not lead to a lower welfare standard.
- The sheep sector depends on quality products with a good image.
- Amongst positive steps in the future are conversion to sustainable organic farming and integration of sheep farming with landscape care.