

# Why Is Health Management Critical for Solar Grazing Operations?



Effective sheep health management is essential to the success of solar grazing operations for the following reasons:

- **Public Perception:** Healthy, well-maintained sheep support the positive image of solar energy, especially at publicly visible sites.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Preventing health issues reduces the need for frequent, time intensive site visits.
- **Grazing Effectiveness:** Healthy sheep graze more efficiently, helping to ensure that vegetation can be properly managed.
- **Biosecurity:** Good health protocols minimize disease spread between sites.
- **Animal Welfare:** Upholding professional standards protects the integrity of the operation.

## Primary Foot Health Concerns in Sheep

Foot health problems are a common challenge and require prompt attention.

- **Foot Rot:** Severe lameness, foul odor, and hoof sole deterioration.
- **Foot Scald:** Inflammation between the toes without sole damage, causing severe lameness.
- **Foot Abscess:** Infection extending into the joint, leading to swelling and lameness.
- **White Line Disease:** Hoof wall and sole separation requiring trimming and additional treatment.

### FOOT HEALTH BEST PRACTICES

- Learn to tip sheep and to inspect feet properly, and to identify early signs of specific foot health issues.
- Use antibiotics when needed and keep animals on dry ground for at least 3 days post-treatment.
- Consider foot rot vaccination (returning to market in early 2024.)
- Maintain treatment records, including date, condition, treatment, and tag number of all treated sheep. Identify treated sheep with spray paint or livestock marker.
- Cull chronically affected sheep from the operation to maintain flock health.



## Parasite Management: Who, Where, and How

### Who Should Manage Parasites?

- **All Handlers and Operators:** Flocks should be regularly monitored for early signs of parasite infections like poor body condition, bottle jaw, or poor FAMACHA scores.
- **Experienced Handlers and Operators:** Individuals who regularly monitor flocks and can recognize early signs of parasite infections like poor body condition, bottle jaw, or poor FAMACHA scores.
- **Strategic Planners:** Individuals who plan pasture rotations to break parasite life cycles and minimize parasite exposure.
- **Selective Breeders:** Individuals who cull hard for parasite-prone animals to build flock resistance.

### Where Are Parasites Most Challenging?

- Wet or low-lying areas.
- Overstocked paddocks.
- Sites with young lambs as they are more vulnerable to parasite issues.
- Locations with limited rotation capacity can increase parasite exposure.
- Remote solar sites where distance can lead to delayed identification and treatment.

### How to Manage Parasites Effectively

- Consider using only adult sheep (1+ years) at solar sites when possible.
- Deworm sheep before deployment and upon return from solar sites.
- Monitor flocks regularly for early warning signs like poor body condition and poor FAMACHA score. Check vulnerable animals, like lambs, more frequently.
- Rotate grazing locations to break parasite life cycles and minimize parasite exposure.
- Return infected animals to the home farm for treatment.
- Consider pre-lambing treatment for ewes to prevent coccidiosis in lambs.
- Practice selective breeding by culling parasite-prone individuals to build flock resistance.

## First Aid Preparation

### First Aid Kit Essentials for Solar Grazing

Every solar grazer should maintain a well-stocked on-site first aid kit including:

- **Handling Tools:** Crook, halters, ropes, portable panels.
- **Hoof Care:** Multiple pairs of trimmers, disinfectants.
- **Medications:** Dewormers, antibiotics, eye ointments, anti-inflammatory drugs.
- **Wound Supplies:** Betadine, gauze, bandage scissors, fly strike treatment.
- **Diagnostics:** Thermometer, flock treatment record notebook.
- **Emergency Equipment:** Tarp for covering deceased animals and come-along for carcass removal.
- **Vet Contact:** A go-to veterinarian and a documented veterinary client patient relationship (VCPR) for remote consultation.



## Scaling Up: Health Challenges & Risk Mitigation

### Key Risk Factors

- Buying large numbers of sheep at once increases disease introduction risk.
- Sourcing from distant or dry regions and moving into wetter regions.
- Co-mingling flocks from different sources can increase disease transmission.
- Purchasing at auctions with unknown histories (lameness, poor mothering, etc.)
- Expanding the flock faster than systems can support.

### How to Reduce Risk

- Buy directly from trusted producers, rather than anonymous auctions.
- Source sheep from similar climates to reduce adaptation needs.
- Arrange future lamb purchases in advance to avoid auctions, when possible.
- Prioritize disease-free animals over production traits when selecting for solar grazing.
- Isolate new sheep for at least 7 days before integrating into existing flocks.
- Avoid mixing flocks during winter housing.
- Test for major diseases, like foot rot, caseous lymphadenitis, or OPP, before acquisition.

## Benefits of Good Health Management

### Flock Profitability

- **Lower Labor Costs:** Fewer emergency calls, visits, and treatments of sick animals.
- **Reduced Replacement Costs:** Lower mortality and culling rates lead to fewer replacement purchases.
- **Sustainable Growth:** Healthy foundation flocks enable business expansion.

### Solar Grazing Success

- **Stronger Public Image:** Healthy sheep reflect well on operations.
- **Better Vegetation Control:** Healthy animals graze more effectively, maintaining improved vegetation management.
- **Satisfied Clients:** Solar operators pleased with your results are motivated to retain and renew solar site agreements.

### Resources for Support

- **Veterinarians:** Build a relationship and document a VCPR before emergencies arise.
- **Extension Services:** Regional support for livestock health.
- **American Solar Grazing Association:** ASGA provides solar grazing best practices, technical assistance, and training certifications.
- **Sheep Care Guide (ASI):** Covers information on well-being criteria for sheep producer using a variety of management and production systems.
- **Training Certification:** ASGA offers certification for solar grazing professionals.
- **American Humane:** AH offers support to keep sheep healthy.

*For more information, contact ASGA at [SolarGrazing.org](https://solargrazing.org) or American Humane Society at [AmericanHumaneFarm.org](https://AmericanHumaneFarm.org).*