

## **SKIRTING FLEECE**

Maximize quality and yield of 'useful' wool.

Skirting = remove the 'skirt' or periphery of the fleece. This includes shorter, poorer quality fleece, second cuts, vegetable matter (VM), poop, sweat tags, guard hairs, tippy or weak areas, cotted/felted areas as well as the belly, distal leg and head wool.

### **Fleece evaluation:**

Clean (no VM)

Sound (no tenderness, felting, second cuts)

Consistent (length, color, luster, crimp/curl and handle)

### **How much to remove during skirting?** Depends on

- quality of fleece (depends on genetics, husbandry, environment)
- how it will be used

Goal is to find the balance between optimizing quality and achieving a satisfactory yield.

**When to skirt?** – at shearing is best, but can be done later

### **Supplies for skirting?**

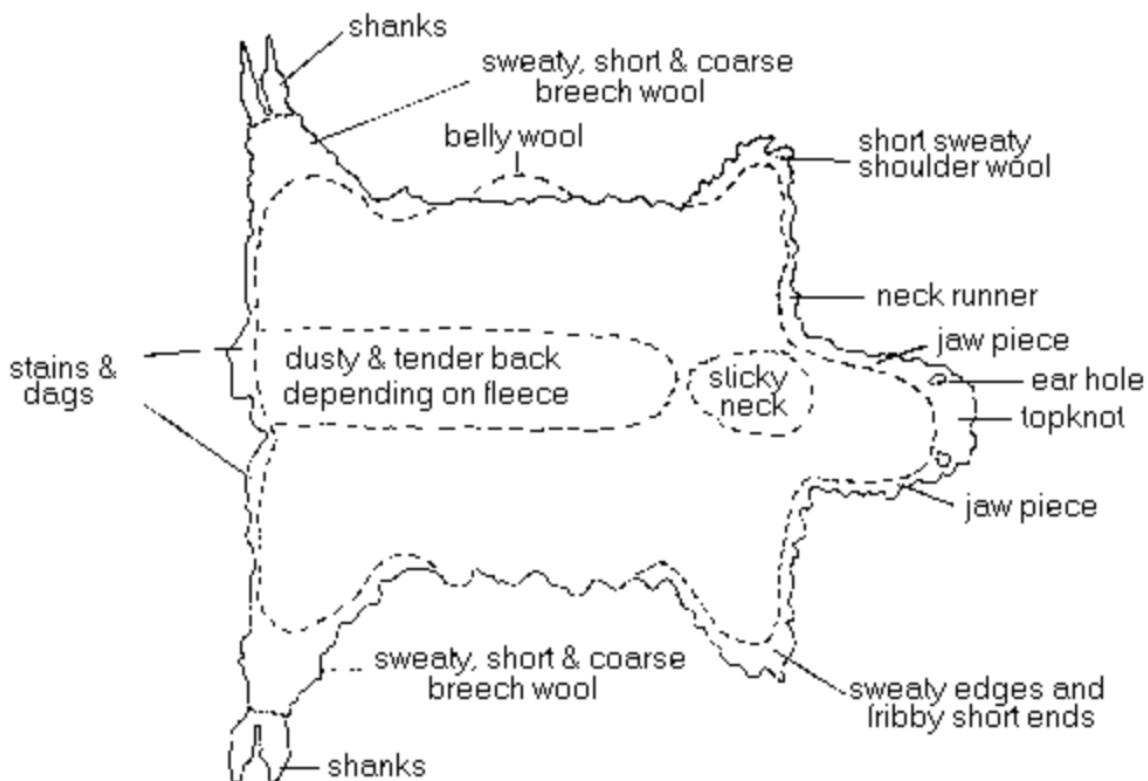
- Skirting table - large enough for entire fleece to be spread out and ideally with holes to allow VM/second cuts to fall through.
- Bags to collect skirtings as well as a system to identify fleeces (ie card in bag, sharpie on bag etc)
- (Scale/balance)
- (ruler)
- (record keeping supplies)

### **How to skirt?** –

lay out entire fleece on flat surface with cut side down, shake out VM/second cuts. (not all fleeces will stay together i.e. lamb fleeces – can be much more difficult to skirt)

- a) Remove head/cheek wool, belly, and distal leg wool if not previously removed

- b) Evaluate the periphery (outer 1-4" or more of the fleece)- remove the shorter, dirtier, contaminated fleece.
- b) Evaluate topline/area along backbone and remove if weak or VM or scurfy
- c) Evaluate the neck and britch region to determine whether they should be removed (i.e. too coarse, VM, staining, guard hair etc).
- d) Evaluate the remaining 'blanket' - check several areas for soundness (tug small lock next to ear – should ping). Any crackling suggests wool fibers breaking. Can also assess for weak spots visually = thinner region. Check for VM, felting, staining & remove affected areas



1. **Initial skirting at shearing** – shear on clean surface, shearer should step away from fleece during shearing and minimize second cuts
  - remove belly, head, lower leg wool, if possible
  - bag fleeces separately – allow fleece to breathe initially
  - record fleece raw weight, length, observations (i.e. hand-spinning quality, flaws etc)

2. **The basic (wool pool) skirt** – often sold for industrial processing (they have methods to deal with VM and ways to use short fibers i.e. woolen spinning)
  - **Clean white wool at least 2-1/2”** in length;
  - **White offsorts - short and dirty fiber, and head and belly wool;**
  - **White longwool** and other coarse white wool;
  - **Natural color wool;** and
  - **Natural color longwool** and other coarse natural color wool
  
3. **Hand-spinner Skirt** – these are among the best fleeces – clean, consistent = more heavily skirted. Often the wool sorted out from these fleeces (ie more of the neck or hind leg areas) are good enough for mill processing.
  
4. **Skirting for mill processing** (class/sort – length, handle, cleanliness).
  - yarn, roving, pin drafted roving top core spun yarn: clean, uniform wool (length, handle) is best
  - top (can remove some VM or variability in fiber length but this will affect yield), core spun rug yarn

Sample form to record fleece data at shearing/skirting:

Date shorn: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Breed \_\_\_\_\_  
 Color \_\_\_\_\_

ID#/name	Raw fleece weight	Skirted weight	length	notes