



Niman Ranch Lamb Protocol and Husbandry Standards

Our Mission

The mission of Niman Ranch is to provide the best-tasting and most consistent lamb by sourcing seasonally fresh lamb from farmers and ranchers that adhere to a strict code of husbandry principles and practices. All Niman Ranch livestock must be humanely treated, fed the finest feeds, never given growth hormones or antibiotics, and raised on land that is cared for as a sustainable resource.

Niman Ranch lamb is:

ALL NATURAL*

Raised with:

No Antibiotics – Ever

No Added Hormones – Ever

All Vegetarian Feeds

Humanely Raised on Environmentally Sustainable Family Ranches

*minimally processed – no artificial ingredients or preservatives

I. Lamb Rancher Requirements

Niman Ranch Lamb farmers and ranchers shall be a family operation on which an individual or family member (a) owns the lambs; (b) depends upon the ranch for his or her livelihood; (c) provides a major part of the daily labor to manage the lambs and ranch operation. This shall not prohibit networking among family ranches as long as every member within the network adheres to all criteria listed herein. All facets of Niman Ranch producers' operations must be based in the United States and all lambs sold to Niman Ranch must be born and raised within the United States.

A representative of Niman Ranch has a personal relationship with every lamb farmer and rancher and will have visited and personally approved every supplier to the Niman Ranch lamb program. All lambs must have full traceability since birth and follow the Niman Ranch Lamb Protocol herein.

All ranchers must sign affidavits confirming their program meets all requirements of this protocol.



II. General Husbandry

Feeds

No feed containing animal proteins are permitted, with the exception of milk products. Lambs sold to Niman Ranch shall never be given any form of growth-promoting hormones, steroids, or antibiotics. Lambs should be consistently fed feeds with adequate concentrations of fiber to allow for proper rumination.

Animals should not be kept for longer than 24 hours in nutrient deficient environments (ie: in holding pens).

Troughs and pens must be kept clean and stale feed should be removed to ensure satisfactory hygiene and comfort.

Animals must always have access to a constant and adequate supply of clean, fresh drinking water.

Shelter and Housing

Shelter from weather extremes (such as tree-line windbreaks, stacked straw bales, or access to the valleys) should be utilized whenever necessary. A sheep's fleece provides excellent protection from cold, rain, snow, and heat; shearing should be done at a time of year that minimizes the risk of adverse weather conditions affect on sheep. Lambs must be protected from heat stresses (ie: presence of salt mix near water, access to geographic areas where breezes are prevalent, and/or where shade is available).

Lambs should only be housed inside a building if: 1) the lamb is newly born and penned for a few days with its mother for bonding, 2) the lamb is being treated for illness, 3) to shelter it temporarily from inclement weather, or 3) the lamb is indoors prior to shearing. Lambs under shelter must be provided with dry beds and the appropriate environment to control temperature and allow for adequate ventilation.

Lambs should at all times be allowed free movement and maximum expression of natural behavior.

Handling

Basic behavioral characteristics should be observed when handling or moving groups of sheep. Animal handlers must be trained and understand the flocking characteristics of sheep and the stresses they experience. Animal handlers must understand the sheep's inflection points and flight zones so that personal positioning will encourage an animal to move in the intended direction.

Proper design and location of corrals and sorting chutes is the primary tool to fluid sheep movement. Facilities should be designed so that they do not impede flock movement, but instead encourage continuous flow. Handling systems, gates and alleys should be designed and maintained to minimize undue stress and prevent injury.

Sheep and lambs should be handled at a time of day appropriate to minimize stress due to weather.



Dogs used for herding must be properly trained and kept under control at all times. Tools standard to the sheep industry can be used as benign handling tools to help initiate movement of sheep. These tools are not used to strike or poke the animal, but used only on the body of the animal whereby minimal light contact will encourage desired movement and prevent harm or bruising.

Health Management

The observation of normal animal behavior and animal body conditions are critically important to help manage and control health problems in sheep. Sheep herders must be trained to identify the difference between normal sheep behavior and abnormal behavior. Normal behavior includes how they feed, how they interact with other sheep in their herd, if they appear stress based on their reactions and how they travel in the pasture.

Sheep herders must be trained to identify the difference between the normal body condition for the herd of sheep and sheep that are losing body condition. When not lactating, the loss of body condition is a sign that a sheep is not receiving adequate nutrition either because of sickness, stress or lack of adequate feed. Astute observations can minimize the management of health problems by identifying issues in the early stages and will help reduce the use of antibiotics in the treatment of sick animals.

The use of sub-therapeutic antibiotics, ionophores, or other feed additives to prevent coccidiosis or bloat is prohibited. Should a lamb become sick or injured and require an antibiotic or other form of medication, that lamb should be treated individually and identified to ensure that it can be properly segregated. Each lamb grower will have a flock management plan on hand with Niman Ranch detailing how medicated lambs are identified. Niman Ranch will not purchase treated lambs.

The use of wormers, dips, pour-ons, and routine vaccinations are approved for use, provided they are administered for the wellness of the lambs (preventing parasites), and that the manufacturer's recommended withdrawal time is observed.

Close attention must be given to condition of the animals' hooves. If foot rot or scald occurs animals must be treated promptly.

Provisions must be made for segregation and proper treatment and care of sick/injured animals, and if necessary, humanely euthanized.

Castration/Tail Docking/Museling

Tail docking must be carried out for cleanliness and to protect the health of lambs from fly infestation. The average age of a group of lambs at tail docking and castration should not be more than one month of age. The timing of these procedures and the method used is done in consideration of the well being of the lamb in terms of stress, minimizing blood loss, and when sanitation of the procedure can be controlled to minimize infections.

Museling must never be performed. Museling is the removal of strips of flesh from the anal and vaginal area to deter flies. This practice is not performed in the United States, but is performed within production systems in Australia and New Zealand where wool breeds are predominant. Niman Ranch and other domestic sheep producers employ proper management such as good breeding and tail docking to prevent fly infestations.



Weaning

Weaning shall take place at an age that considers the health and welfare of both the lamb and its mother. This age may vary depending on the breed, level of milk production, ewe age and health, the health of her lambs, and feed conditions. Weaning should never take place before 5 weeks of age. The recommended minimum weaning age is 90 days (12 weeks of age).

Transit

Loading docks and ramps must be designed to minimize slippage during loading.

Persons who transport lambs should attend to the animals and take necessary steps to ensure that the animals are not injured or caused to suffer during loading, transport, and unloading.

Predation

Predation results in the greatest losses to sheep producers and is one of the greatest stresses on a sheep flock. All animals should be appropriately protected from predation. Non-lethal methods should be utilized as the sheep's primary protection against predators including fencing, guard animals, noise devices, field rotations, and mix species grazing (cattle and sheep in the same field). Fences should be tight and properly monitored and maintained. Predator control must coincide with all federal, state, and local governmental regulations and, when necessary, the local Wildlife Service should be consulted to help curb predator loss.

III. Rangel and Management

Ranchers shall treat their rangeland and cropland as a sustainable resource. Proper land management that ensures better resource use and promotes long-term sustainability is essential to future food production and to the economic welfare of rural communities.

Sheep grazing can enhance range and grasslands when managed appropriately. Proper grazing management can stimulate sensitive plant growth and sensitive animal populations. Proper grazing management should take into consideration both the well-being of the environment and the well-being of the sheep. Each ranch is uniquely different and what works for one ranch might not work for another ranch.

Management techniques such as appropriate fencing, salt placement, feed supplementation during drought, providing additional water sources, stocking densities, improving trails and herding are used to improve the range and pasturelands.

Proper land management includes carefully monitoring the quality/fertility of soils, presence of vegetation cover, acidification, plant nutrient status, erosion, organic matter, salinity and salinization (particularly in irrigated systems).

Niman Ranch will not permit the use of human waste/sludge/sewage spread on pastured land.



IV. Feeder Lambs

On occasion Niman Ranch growers will purchase lambs from neighboring ranchers to be sold into the Niman Ranch program. In such instances the initial owner of the sheep will sign an affidavit to assure all lambs sold to Niman Ranch are raised in accordance with the protocols detailed within.

V. Finishing Pastures and/or Pens

Lambs shall be given adequate space to behave naturally and, whenever possible, should be housed with their natural social group (the lambs they were raised with). Lambs must not be confined closely for any reason other than examinations, vaccinations, tests, veterinary treatment, feeding, weighing, dipping, and transit loading. Individual lambs can only be kept in isolation from other sheep if they are being treated for sickness.

When grazing conditions are optimum, lambs can be finished directly off pasture (mixtures of grasses, forbes, clover, and/or alfalfa).

When grazing conditions do not allow for lambs to finish off forage, lambs are typically grain fed for 30 to 70 days. Finishing periods may be increased or decreased based on grass conditions, weaning weights, and body condition and weight of lambs before being fed grain.

Lambs should be grouped into finishing pens based on similar age, weight, and body conditions so all lambs have the same opportunities in establishing social order and utilizing food sources. This type of grouping helps minimize unfair social competitions among lambs. This type of grouping encourages all the lambs to leave the finishing pens at approximately the same time so new lambs entering the finishing pens are not commingled with lambs that have been on feed for a longer time.

Feed shall consist of a vegetarian diet of grains, alfalfa, or roughage in some combination, and shall never contain animal by-products, therapeutic antibiotics, ionophores, or other feed additives to prevent coccidiosis or bloat. The finishing diet should contain at least 50% roughage. Salt-mineral mix should be made available at all times.

Water should be provided fresh and on a continuous basis. Feed can be provided ad libitum (free choice) or in regular intervals per day. Troughs should be cleaned regularly.

Pens shall be kept clean to ensure satisfactory hygiene and comfort. Surroundings shall not prevent animals from behaving naturally or be cause for undue stress.

The feeding pens should be designed such that it has no negative impact to the environment. Manure should be managed as a beneficial by-product and recycled appropriately as on-farm fertilizer or adequate space should be provided in feed lot such that manure accumulation is not an issue.



VI. Processing Facility

The processing facility must be designed for low-stress movement of lambs and approved by Niman Ranch for humane handling and processing of lambs.

Lambs are to be delivered to the processing facility the evening before harvest and allowed to rest a minimum of two hours prior to harvest. Niman Ranch Lambs are segregated from other lambs in the facility and free choice water is provided.

The processing facility is USDA inspected and meets all government regulations for the processing of lamb.

Niman Ranch personnel may be present to assist in the handling and data collection of lambs and monitor processing at the facility.