



# NIMAN RANCH LAMB PROTOCOLS

## 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 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 raised on pasture- and range-based family farms and ranches that are committed to preserving the land and its resources for future generations.

Niman Ranch Lamb is also:

- ALL NATURAL\*
  - From Lambs Raised With:
  - No Antibiotics – Ever
  - No Added Hormones – Ever
  - All Vegetarian Feeds

\*minimally processed – no artificial ingredients or preservatives.

## 1.) Lamb Rancher Requirements

Niman Ranch Lamb farmers and ranchers shall be a family operation on which the individual, family member, or family-owned business owns the lambs; and provides a major part of the management of the lamb ranching/farming 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 to ranch of origin – either individually or as a group - since birth and follow the Niman Ranch Lamb Protocol herein.

All ranchers must sign affidavits confirming their program meets all requirements of this protocol, as well as the Human Farm Animal Care Sheep Standards as written in each ranch's Statement of Operation.

## 2.) General Husbandry

Our overriding objective is for sheep and lambs to be treated humanely, with dignity and respect.

### Feeds and Feeding

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. The roughage component of the diet should always be in excess of 50%.



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Animals should not be kept for longer than 24 hours in nutrient deficient environments (ie: in holding pens). Animals should never be without access to hydration for more than 24 hours. Hydration can include clean snow when season and stage of production allow.

Troughs and pens must be kept clean and stale feed and/or water should be removed to ensure satisfactory hygiene and comfort. When moving sheep to a new paddock or pen, water troughs should be flushed so that fresh water is provided. If fresh water is continuously flowing into and out of the trough (via overflow or drinking) algae is acceptable in the water as long as it 1) doesn't cover more than 75% of the surface and 2) the water being consumed is fresh and clear.

## 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. Shearing should be planned to optimize against the risks posed by regional climactic conditions. Should adverse weather conditions be presented within two weeks of shearing appropriate actions must be taken, such as providing the sheep with increased feed, wind breaks, shade/shelter.

Lambs under shelter must be provided with dry bedding and the appropriate environment to control temperature and allow for adequate ventilation.

## 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. Careful attention should be given to hazardous locations on fences, gates, and chutes that could cause harm to sheep.

Sheep and lambs should be handled at a time of day appropriate to minimize possibility of heat stress and assure more fluid movement of sheep based on the position of the sun.

Dogs used for herding must be properly trained and kept under control at all times; biting should not be tolerated. Tools can be used as benign handling tools to help initiate movement of sheep. These tools are not used to strike the animal, but used only on the body of the animal whereby minimal and 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.

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The use of sub-therapeutic antibiotics and non-ionophore coccidiostats are prohibited for use with lambs sold to Niman Ranch. 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.

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. Neglected health problems will not be allowed in the ewe flock.

Niman Ranch strongly recommends an aggressive health program that includes vaccinating against clostridial diseases, controlling internal and external parasites, and a well-balanced vitamin and mineral program that enhances the immune system.

## **Castration and Tail Docking**

For most breeds 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 be close to fourteen days of age and no more than 30 days. When docking and castration are necessary we recommend doing both at the same time to minimize the stress of handling. 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. For breeds in which it is appropriate to dock tails, lambs raised for Niman Ranch must have tails removed at the distal end of the caudal fold or longer. The use of a hot docking iron is the preferred methodology to dock tails.

## **Weaning**

Weaning shall take place at an age that considers the health and welfare of both the lamb and its mother. Weaning 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.

## **Transit**

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

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. Handling of sheep will be done with utmost care in loading and unloading, as well as moving of sheep.

## **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 in as much as possible. Non-lethal methods should be utilized as the shepherd's primary protection against predators including fencing, guard animals, noise devises, field rotations, and mix species grazing (cattle and sheep in the same field). 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.

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## 3.) Pastureland and Rangeland Management

Ranchers shall treat their pasture, range, 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 farming and ranching communities. Sheep and lambs on abused or over-grazed pasture/range will not be allowed.

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.

## 4.) 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.

## 5.) Finishing Pastures and/or Pens

Lambs shall be given adequate space to behave naturally. Lambs must not be confined closely for any reason other than examinations, vaccinations, tests, veterinary treatment, feeding, weighing, dipping, and transit loading.

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.

Feed shall consist of a vegetarian diet of grains, alfalfa, or roughage in some combination, and shall never contain animal by-products, therapeutic antibiotics, or non-ionophore coccidiostats. The finishing diet should contain at least 50% roughage. Salt-mineral mix should be made available.

Water should be provided fresh and on a continuous basis; clean snow will meet a sheep's need for hydration.

Pens shall be kept clean and/or well-bedded 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.

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## 6.) Processing Facility

The processing facility must be designed for low-stress movement of lambs.

Lambs are to be delivered to the processing facility and allowed to rest a minimum of two hours prior to harvest and no more than 18 hours. 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 lamb, and monitor processing at the facility.