

Planetary Wellbeing

- Cut Pollution & Toxicity
- Ensure Animal Wellness**
 - Animal Shelters and Humane Societies
 - Cruelty-Free Consumerism
 - Fashion and Food Industry**
 - Animal Cruelty**
 - Pet Overpopulation, Spaying, & Neutering
 - Vegetarian Nutrition
- Guard Water Resources
- Ocean Awareness
- Protect Biodiversity
- Reduce Resource Consumption
- Save Energy & Climate

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Keep Sheep Happy with Cruelty-Free Wool

As gentle and quiet animals unable to defend themselves, sheep are subjected to incredible pain and cruelty to provide us with wool felt. You can make the lives of sheep much more pleasant, though! Hearts has put together this guide to cruelty-free wool to make more humane purchasing decisions easier for you. Thanks for using your purchasing power for good! Gleeful sheep everywhere will thank you!

Quick Guide: Uncovering Sheep Cruelty in the Big Business of Wool Production

- **How sheep grow wool:** Sheep's wool protects them against cold winters and hot summers (it's true!).^[i] They produce about eight pounds of wool each at any given time.^[ii]
- **The sheep of America:** Sheep are raised in America in Texas, California, and Colorado.^[iii] There are about 5.3 million of them in all! Monthly they produce about 2.4 million pounds of wool!^[iv]
- **Why wool is so great:** Used for fashion and home décor (wool rugs or wool blankets), wool is easy to keep clean, wicks away moisture, repels mold, and resists flames.^[v]
- **The cruel practice of mulesing:** Merino sheep (popular in Australia) have wrinkly skin to increase wool production, but this exposes them to heat exhaustion and makes their skin ideal for the laying of fly eggs. Farmers use a painful technique called mulesing (without painkillers) is to cut chunks of skin from the sheep to deter insects from laying eggs.^[vi] Between 55% and 80% of Merino sheep in Australia experience mulesing.^[vii]
- **Exposing sheep to toxic pesticides:** To control other pests on the sheep, farmers spray chemicals directly on to sheep – chemicals that are toxic to the sheep and the local ecosystem.^[viii]
- **The cruelty of live sheep export:** About 1% of the four million exported sheep die in the journey.^{[ix] [x]} The journey takes several weeks inside crowded, disease-infested ships where illnesses and starvation are common. Small lambs and sheep that are lame get trampled on and die from suffocation.^[xi] Australia exports the most sheep to countries like the Middle East, North Africa, Mexico, the Philippines, China, and other South East Asian countries.



Take Action! Support Happy Sheep with Humane Logo'd Wool Fabric

Cruelty-free wool logo #1: VT Organic Fiber: This organization has strict standards requiring their farmers to feed their sheep only organic foods, never to treat pastures with chemicals, and never to practice mulesing. Their sheep are also raised in the US and Canada, which means they do not need to endure long, dangerous sea journeys.

Cruelty-free wool logo #2: NewMerino: The New Merino brand provides a chain of custody system that tracks where wool comes from. Their preferred producers sign declarations certifying that they never use mulesing.

Cruelty-free wool logo #3: DeFeet: This organization has developed a Certified Woolie stamp of approval for cruelty-free fashion created from certified non-mulesed sheep. These sheep are raised in the USA, so they're spared a long-distance sea journey, too.

Cruelty-free wool logo #4: The Merino Co. (TMC) of Australia: This organization has a unique **Sheep-to-Shelf traceability** system so that you can trace their wool right back to its origins, including any farm certifications used for the sheep or the wool, such as **EU Eco-Label**, **REACH**, **GOTS**, and **Oeko-Tex-100** (not all of which address cruelty). This includes those farmers who adhere to a no-mulesed system. However, in order to know for sure whether your wool adheres to cruelty-free or organic standards, you need to look for the individual eco labels as well as the TMC label together. TMC alone doesn't guarantee cruelty-free or organic.

Take Action! Shopping for Eco Wool Fashion

1. What to do when wool doesn't have a cruelty-free logo: Many ethical businesses, including Hearts, produce cruelty-free fashion using ethically sourced wool. If the fashion house doesn't label their ethical fashion with one of the cruelty-free logos mentioned above, start by checking PETA's [Shopping Guide to Compassionate Clothing](#) to see if they're listed. If not, ask the designer if they can trace their wool back to the farm (if not, look for another wool option). If they can trace their wool, ask them these questions:

- Do you practice mulesing?
- Do you use organic feed?
- Do you spray your sheep with pesticides?
- Are the sheep free range?
- Do your sheep have to ensure long sea journeys?

2. Look for vegan wool alternatives: If you can't find cruelty-free certified wool, look for vegan alternatives like faux wool and polyester fleece. [Tencel](#) is another option, produced using wood pulp and perfect for dress suits and jackets.

3. Sign petitions against mulesing: PETA's [petition asking the Prime Minister of Australia to outlaw mulesing](#) is a voice for these innocent animals! So is the [Stop Live Exports](#) addressed to the President and Members of the Legislative Council of Western Australia Parliament. Your voice is important!

4. Support nonprofits fighting for cruelty free sheep standards: Join NGOs that are fighting against cruelty to sheep by donating to or volunteering for [Animals Australia](#), [PETA](#), [Stop Live Exports](#), and [The Humane Society of the United States](#).



Dig Deeper: Take a Stand Against Cruel Sheep Raising Practices

- Animal Activism Queensland has some [campaign materials](#) that you can download and reproduce for free to fight against sheep cruelty.
- [PETA published a report](#) which proves that mulesing has terrible effects on sheep, contrary to what the wool industry claims. Part of this report details effective alternatives to mulesing.
- The Humane Society provides a [guide on how to determine whether a fabric uses fake or real fur or wool](#).

Images by [Aleksander Dragnes](#) and [mamamarce](#)

[i] The wool industry. (n.d.). In *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*. Retrieved September 4, 2012, from <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-clothing/wool-industry.aspx>

[ii] Kopren, W. (n.d.). Another revenue option: Sheep shearing & wool production. In *Sheep USA*. Retrieved September 5, 2012, from http://www.sheepusa.org/user_files/file_991.pdf

[iii] US Department of Agriculture: Forest Service. (2012, January 27). Sheep and goats. In *Cornell University Library*. Retrieved September 4, 2012, from <http://usda01.library.cornell.edu/usda/current/SheeGoat/SheeGoat-01-27-2012.pdf>

[iv] (Sheep and goats)

[v] Wool Producers Australia. (1985). End uses. In *Wool Producers Australia*. Retrieved September 4, 2012, from <http://www.woolproducers.com.au/about-wool/end-users/>

[vi] People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. (n.d.). Environmental hazards of wool. In *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*. Retrieved September 4, 2012, from <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-clothing/wool-environmental-hazards.aspx>

[vii] People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. (1985). An examination of two major forms of cruelty in Australian wool production: Mulesing and live exports. In *The cost of parasites to the Australian sheep industry*. N.p.: Quarterly Review of the Rural Economy. Retrieved September 4, 2012, from <http://www.livexports.com/mulesing.txt>

[viii] People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. (n.d.). Environmental hazards of wool. In *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*. Retrieved September 4, 2012, from <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-clothing/wool-environmental-hazards.aspx>

[ix] People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. (n.d.). Live export by the wool industry. In *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*. Retrieved September 4, 2012, from <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-clothing/wool-live-export.aspx>

[x] Animal Liberation Victoria. (n.d.). Sheep. In *Animal Liberation Victoria*. Retrieved September 4, 2012, from <http://www.alv.org.au/issues/sheep.php>

[xi] (Live export by the wool industry)

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Judith Burkhardt Williams

Thank you for educating us. This is a very new territory for me. Wow. Horrifying. I had no idea. I will NEVER support this in my search for cruelty free wool for my projects.

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