

NEWS UP DATE

Spring

2008

FLY-STRIKE PREVENTION: AVOIDING PESTICIDES

Last year's warm spring helped lambing, but brought early fly strike. Customers who used pesticides to tackle the problem unfortunately removed the value of their fleece for spinning.

The following action can be taken before resorting to pesticides:

- Daily observation, note animals who stand apart. Look for those rubbing against fence posts, or animals that have a damp-looking patch. Investigate, treat topically and do not send that particular fleece for processing;

- On close days when flies are around, use horse-fly repellent or make up your own mixture. Use a spray bottle with water, which increases the volume and spread and dilutes the spray, a little cooking oil, which makes the mixture stick, and aromatherapy oils such as tea tree, eucalyptus or citronella. This will need to be used every day, not just once;

- Introduce garlic into the feed. They won't be keen at first, but can be persuaded!

- Shear as early as possible;

- If possible keep the flock on high, windy ground, away from water courses and trees;

- Use a fly trap (see article on page two)

Even if your fleece is of low value, the income still offsets the cost of shearing. We have an information sheet about maximising value, let us know and we will send you a copy.

This year there is also Bluetongue. We have already written to the sheep breeding societies urging them to apply for the vaccine immediately. Rare breed flocks are particularly vulnerable because their bloodlines are irreplaceable.

Discounts and loyalty bonus

To do our bit to help ease the difficult economic outlook, the 5% Leap Year discount for all customers has been extended from the end of February until 30 April.

We have always offered negotiable discounts for production batches of 100 kilograms and over, but are now extending this for batches upwards of 40 kilograms which we hope will particularly help those planning weaving.

The 40 kilogram discount is 5%, the 100 kilogram discount 7.5% up to 250 kilograms and 10% thereafter.

For those customers who have spent over £1,000 with us in the last 12 months, we are extending the spring sale discounts – 2% on all orders until further notice! Once you hit the £1,000 annual spend you will join this select band which includes roughly 20% of customers.



The Natural Fibre Company

Flytraps explained

Flytraps have been developed by biologists for sampling purposes in research and appear to have been effective.

They rely on a form of bait attractive to flies like the



Australian blowfly shown here or his or her Pommie cousin below.

This is rotting meat, a design from which they cannot escape, usually a bag or bucket with a narrow opening, plus a means to kill them, either a pesticide or water to drown them.

Drowning is obviously preferable on grounds of cost and environmental impact!

A key element in their efficacy is to ensure that the smell of the bait is well distributed. The traps have to be set high and positioned so that the wind does the job.

There are some peculiarities. Flies like early stage rotting rather than late stage, and according to some Indian research prefer green buckets to grey, red, yellow or black.

To begin it is necessary to eliminate the type of environments relished by flies – fresh corpses of murdered relatives, rotting food and general un-cleanliness.

The traps also need setting strictly according to the instructions. Some are aimed at catching flies to indicate that a pesticide is needed, but the effective products appear to remove up to 90% of the problem.



We have researched the Internet for solutions, but we have not tried any of the products and are therefore mentioning, but not recommending them.

The two UK-based suppliers we found were Redtop-fly-trap.com in Eastleigh, Hampshire, which uses an imported South African design, and the Agrilure from Agrimin.com which was designed in partnership with Bristol University and is approved by Organic Farmers and Growers.

There is also the Luci trap, designed in Australia. There is an excellent web site description at bioinsectsa.com/luci of South Africa.

DEFRA covered blowfly strike in a November 2005 publication in November 2005 produced through the SCOPS initiative, Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep.

Warning: check your deliveries

Our carriers TNT are reliable, but the following sad story is worth passing on.

At a busy moment a customer signed for goods without checking and found that not only was the sack wet and damaged, but some of the wool had been lost.

The delivery people want to get away fast and will not wait while you check. So please ALWAYS sign and add the magic words NOT CHECKED.

Without this we can do nothing as the carrier will not issue a claim form assuming that the damage was after the goods arrived. There is nothing we can do about this: it is your responsibility!

The Wool and Willow shop at Hay-on-Wye plans to develop, and anyone interested in getting involved should contact Myra on 01570 493231.

Scheme customers must submit at least of 5 kilogram of fleece a year to get their discounts. Subject to quality and pesticide compliance, we can buy your fleece for our own use, but this does not qualify for discounts.



The Natural Fibre Company



Gearing up for colourful future

We have secured grant and other funding to install a dye plant that will use organically accredited dyes which can also be used on non-organic yarns.

The plant will be installed and tested it over the spring and summer so that we have all the colours available by the time the main clip comes in for processing. This should give customers a chance to plan products for Christmas.

Any of our customers who have been round the mill at Launceston know how much we have packed into 10,000 square feet. The dye plant requires a steam boiler, masses of pipe-work and plenty of water.

This means that the staff have been evicted from their tea-corner to more palatial surroundings at the back of the office area.

Some of you may know exactly what you want. If not look at the illustrations here which should give you some ideas. It's almost a case of 'Think of a colour! Any colour!'

At first we advise using secondary, rather than primary colours as these better complement the natural colours of the yarn.

Think of the dyes as you do paint. Browns and greys go with different things; blues match better with greys; and golds with browns. Pinks/turquoise/purple will go with either.

This year's shades include a number of pastels and clearer colours. Think of beaches, ice creams, terracotta, jade, sand, peaches or limes. For deeper colours, go for reds, purples and dark greens. There are still plenty of greys and blues.

It may be wise to start by dyeing a small quantity of yarn to enable you to make a pattern

using both natural and the dyed colours together. Also you could dye perhaps 10% of a weaving yarn batch to add a few stripes or checks, just to lift the natural colours.

Our smallest quantity is a one-hank sample. Production is done in 10 or 25 kilogram batches. To help you, we can combine yarns from several customers to make up a batch. Each yarn will still dye to an individual shade due to the unique characteristics of each fleece and fibre.

Although we will do all we can, as with the blends of natural wool colours, we cannot guarantee that dyed colours will match between batches, so your colours will always be unique!

At first we will only do hank dyeing. This means that all yarns must be plied. So for weaving we will spin two-ply high twist yarns to the thickness you require.

We are hunting for a small-scale, pressure dyeing machine for cones. Let us know if you happen across one!

Dye prices – per colour, excluding VAT:

**Up to 1 kilogram, £25;
1-10 kilograms,
£20 per kilogram;
10-25 kilograms,
£17 per kilogram.**

For space dyeing and special small batches: prices on application



Think of of a colour....



The Natural Fibre Company

Staying green...

Even before the Budget attack on supermarket bags, we looked at our packaging to see if we could reduce both the cost and environmental impact, but the auditor said we were doing pretty well everything we could.

We use recycled envelopes and second hand cardboard boxes, but will change from plastic to paper tape to stick them.

Our polypropylene sacks are re-used round the mill until they collapse and we know our customers also re-use them. So even if they are plastic, they are still fit for purpose.

Although we want to stop using plastic bags for our knitting yarns, we need to keep them clean and you need to see them!

The grip-seal plastic bags are re-usable, so this helps. We are looking at a suitable bio-degradable plastic as an alternative.

Another option might be a box with a small window, using less plastic, but this will be more expensive.

To recover the cost, we charge our cones at the same price as the wool on which they are wound. We ask customers to return them for re-use, but this rarely happens.

When we need to replace, we try to buy second hand or paper cones where possible. Sadly, we cannot use any cone, as the size and gradient are specific for each cone winder.

Spot the Difference

What is the difference between woollen and worsted? The simple answer is that woollen yarns are designed to trap air, while worsted yarns exclude it.

Woolens will therefore will have greater insulation capability and be lighter, loftier and warmer; weight for weight worsted will be smoother, harder and stronger.

A woollen yarn is made by spinning a carded slubbing which is what the card divides at the condenser end into narrow strips of roving. A worsted yarn is made by spinning a top. Tops are rovings prepared by gilling and combing which align the fibres and removes the short ones.

Woollen spinning has much less draft (less than 20%) of the slubbing than worsted, which elongates the rovings by 25% or more – this would simply break a woollen slubbing.

There is an intermediate form, semi worsted, when the carded output is drawn out into rovings then spun on worsted spinning frames. This is mainly done at mini-mills.

More processes are involved in making worsted so it's more expensive. Because the short fibres are combed out, worsted has a lower yield from the original weight of fleece than wool.

Fibre suitable for woollen spinning can be shorter, while for worsted it must be longer. The refining processes for worsted make very fine and smooth fibre difficult to process without the addition of something to hold it together.

We generally recommend adding some wool for woollen spinning smooth fibres such as adult mohair or fine alpaca. This is even more important with worsted spinning and we would expect to add 25-30%, or even 50% in some cases..

If a fibre can be worsted processed it will produce a smoother, softer-feeling knitting yarn. Woollen spun yarns tend to soften with age, while worsted ones will not change as much.

Generally woollen spun yarns are used for knitwear, scarves, shawls, blankets and tweeds, while worsted yarn is used for fine knitwear, suiting and furnishing fabrics.

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