



## Rethinking sheepishness

Dear Editor, Have you ever been accused of acting like a sheep? It's a compliment! A new study by a neuroscientist shows that sheep are complex, individualistic, and social animals. But farmers still treat sheep as mere commodities, which makes it easier to confine, torment and slaughter them. Sheep have excellent vision and hearing, as well as sense of smell. They have extremely sophisticated face recognition skills and can interpret emotions on the faces of other sheep. They can also recognise human faces, even when those faces are shown to them in different orientations. Tests show that sheep can feel optimistic or pessimistic – just like humans, sheep who have had bad experiences in the past tend to not do as well on cognitive tasks as those who had good experiences. Sheep also have individual personalities – distinctive combinations of traits that are consistent over time and that map readily onto some of the personality dimensions we recognize in humans, such as boldness or shyness. Knowing this, it's abhorrent that farmers routinely punch holes in lambs' ears, chop off their tails, and castrate males without the use of anaesthetics. In Australia, many lambs are also forced to endure a gruesome procedure called "mulesing", in which huge chunks of skin and flesh are cut from the animals' backsides, sometimes without any painkillers. PETA exposés have consistently shown shearing sheds to be among the worst places in the world for cruelty to animals. And when their monetary value diminishes, sheep are often shipped across the equator to the other side of the world in appalling conditions; those who survive the trips will meet a gruesome death in countries where animal welfare standards are even lower than Australia's. Sheep are intelligent, complex, and feeling individuals. Treating them as unfeeling commodities may be profitable, but it is totally immoral. Desmond Bellamy Special Projects Coordinator PETA Australia PO Box 2352 Byron Bay NSW 2481 08 8556-5828 DesmondB@PETA.org.au

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