

Club Lamb Management Guide

To show a market lamb competitively as your 4-H livestock project, learn first how to care for your animal properly. You must devote many hours over several months to the proper care, feeding, and management of a potentially award-winning lamb.

Lambs may be purchased through various sales around the state. During the late spring and summer, usually one or more sales occur every week somewhere in the country. Information on lamb sales is available through magazines such as *The Showbox*, *Show Circuit*, and *The Purple Circle* and through the MSU-ES newsletter *Animal Lines*.

Determine which shows you plan to attend. Decisions about the type of feeder lamb to purchase and raise will depend upon the time of the show you plan to enter.

Obtain a show schedule and a copy of the exhibitor rules and regulations from your county agent, from an FFA advisor, or from the show directly. It is your responsibility, as an exhibitor, to read the general rules and regulations, as well as any special rules governing each show you attend. This information will tell you the judge, the number of lambs you may enter, the type of classification system used, the ownership dates, and the entry deadlines.

Before purchasing a lamb, consider the time commitment, the facilities and equipment needed, and the maintenance expenses involved with caring for a lamb to show.

Facilities and Equipment

A major advantage of a club lamb project is that you can feed and manage lambs without elaborate facilities. A barn or shed where lambs can retreat from cold, wet, and drafty conditions and a small pen with outside exposure are essential. Feed troughs, water containers, adequate fencing, and an exercise area are necessary; other equipment/supplies are optional.

Barns and Sheds

Allow at least 20 square feet of space per lamb for an ideal barn or shed. The outside pen can be any size that is convenient. Provide a well-drained facility that is open to the east or to the south.

Barn temperature is critical. Ventilate the barn well so lambs will remain cool and continue to grow during the summer. Fans are a necessity in hot and humid areas of the southeastern United States.

When club lambs are slick shorn for shows in the winter months, close the barn to keep lambs as warm as possible. Cover the front of the barn with a tarp or a plastic sheet, and use heat lamps.

Feeders

You may use self-feeders in the early stages of feeding club lambs. Hang them at least 8 inches off the ground. Once lambs are hand fed, use movable troughs that hang at appropriate heights. Hang the trough at the same height as the top of the shoulder of the lamb being fed. If desired, move the trough up, increasing the elevation and encouraging the lamb to reach for feed. This practice helps build the loin, but it can overextend the top if used in excess. Take down movable troughs regularly to clean them.

Elevate hay and mineral feeders off the ground. Use small, individual feeding stalls to accurately measure the feed consumption of each lamb. Using individual stalls requires extra pen space and consumes more time; however, it is an excellent way to individually feed and monitor lambs.

Water Containers

Fresh water is the most important nutrient for club lambs. Use small water containers so they can be drained and cleaned daily. Locate the containers in the shade to keep the water cool.

Fences

Make fences at least 42 inches high to discourage lambs from jumping over them. Also, make fences strong enough to keep out predators.

Supplies

To feed and exhibit a club lamb properly, you need access to the following supplies:

- ✂ stiff brush to clean water troughs
- ✂ electric clippers with cutters and combs
- ✂ one small wool card or poodle comb
- ✂ syringes and needles
- ✂ lamb blankets and/or socks
- ✂ rope halters
- ✂ hoof trimmers
- ✂ hand shears
- ✂ bolus gun for giving medication
- ✂ small portable feed troughs
- ✂ extension cords

The following supplies are optional but may be needed if you exhibit several lambs at major shows:

- ✂ small animal clippers
- ✂ hair head electric clippers
- ✂ show box to hold equipment
- ✂ hot air blower or dryer
- ✂ portable livestock scales
- ✂ muzzles
- ✂ electric fans

Selection Considerations

A winning lamb is a combination of proper selection, good nutrition management, a good exercise program, and excellent showmanship (See Extension publication *P2211 Lamb Showmanship*).

Selection of the lamb for a project is one of the most important decisions you will make. The type of lamb you select will have a major influence on the project's results.

People differ in their ability to select animals. Some have a natural eye for selecting young animals of high quality, whereas others never develop this ability. Ask for help, if needed, from someone with these skills; it may be your county Extension agent, FFA instructor, parent, or some other leader in your county. Many breeders are willing to assist you in your selection.

When selecting a lamb, be aware of its wool length and fat thickness. If possible, select your club lamb after shearing. Young lambs that are in bloom and are fat always look good, whereas young lambs that are thin may not. Learn to look past the fat and recognize muscle, ensuring that you pick a lamb that is genetically superior.

When purchasing a lamb, it is important to know something about the lamb producer. Do not hesitate to ask questions about the lamb's bloodlines and the age of the lamb.

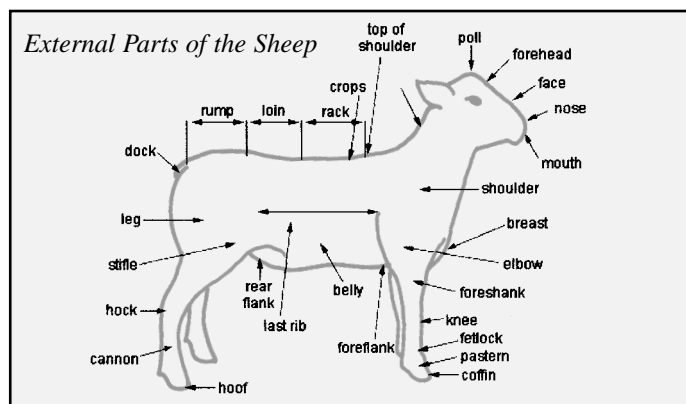
Consider the following factors when you select a lamb:

Classification

Show lamb classification relies upon the animal's physical characteristics, which include color markings, physical structure, wool placement, and ear size. When selecting a lamb, be sure it will classify within the division you want to show it in.

Muscle

Select a lamb that feels firm or hard muscled. The lamb should have a good expression of muscle from the shoulder to the rump down its top. It should have a long, level, square rump with good width at the pin bones (dock). Other good indicators of muscling are the forearm and leg muscles. The widest part of the leg, when viewed from behind, should be through the middle of the leg or the stifle area. A lamb that walks and stands wide is generally going to be more heavily muscled.



Structural Correctness

Structural correctness refers to the skeletal system or bone structure of an animal. A lamb should hold its head erect, and the neck should extend out of the top of the shoulder. A lamb should be straight on both its front and rear legs, and the legs should be placed squarely under the body. A lamb should have a strong top and a long, level rump. It should be heavy boned and be strong on its pasterns. Avoid open-shouldered, weak-topped, steep-rumped lambs.

Style and Balance

Style and balance refer to the way all body parts blend together, how the front end matches the rear end, and the eye appeal of the lamb. When viewed from the side, a lamb should have a clean front, smooth shoulder, level top, level rump, trim middle, and straight legs. Because all club lambs are shorn smooth, it is absolutely necessary that the lamb have a tight hide, free of wrinkles. A good, smooth, thin-hided lamb has eye appeal and will handle well when properly finished. A lamb that is balanced, smooth, pretty, and holds its head up is usually the first one you notice when you walk into the pen.

Growth Potential

The ability of an animal to grow rapidly is very important. Generally, larger framed lambs, as indicated by a long head, neck, cannon bone, and body, will grow faster, be larger, and be more competitive in the show ring. Under normal circumstances, lambs that are extremely long in the loin and rump (higher percent hindsaddle) will have an advantage over the others.

Nutrition Management

No magic feeds or rations make champions. It is the total program—including the feeding schedule, the exercise program, and the careful observation of the lamb during growing and finishing stages—that makes a champion lamb. To establish a good feeding program, study the lamb and use all available information to decide when to make feed changes. To develop a successful feeding program for a particular lamb, it helps to know how lambs from similar genetic backgrounds usually develop, and it helps to observe the lamb carefully during the feeding period.

Basic Nutrients

All livestock, including lambs, require the following basic nutrients:

Water. Lean tissue consists of more than 70 percent water. Clean, fresh water is required daily to provide the necessary fluids to keep the body functioning at optimum levels. In hot summer months, some lambs drink too much water and appear full. Never deprive your lamb of water. If water is limited, feed consumption will decline. However, reducing water intake immediately before a show can reduce the size of the rumen and make the lamb look trimmer and more appealing in the show ring.

Protein. The primary element of the animal body is protein. Dietary protein maintains protein in body tissues, provides for carriers of other nutrients, and is a major component of various products such as meat, milk, and fiber. Protein requirements for lambs vary according to their size, age, and maturity. Young, fast-growing lambs need rations that contain 16 to 18 percent protein to allow them to grow and develop their muscle potential. Feed lambs lower protein diets during the finishing stage. Older lambs are easily fattened on rations containing 11 to 12 percent protein.

Carbohydrates and Fats. The most common limiting nutrients in lamb rations are energy-producing carbohydrates and fats. Inadequate energy intake reduces growth and causes weight loss. An adequate supply of energy is necessary for efficient nutrient use. Grain and protein supplements are high in energy, whereas hay contains less carbohydrates and fats. In lamb rations, too much energy intake can be as damaging as not enough.

Minerals. Important minerals in lamb rations are salt (sodium and chlorine), calcium, and phosphorus. It is recommended that loose salt and a loose trace mineral (copper free) for ruminants be fed free choice at all times. Calcium and phosphorus are necessary for proper growth and development. Feed lambs a ratio of approximately 2.5 parts calcium to 1 part phosphorus. Use a feed ration that contains ammonium chloride to help prevent urinary calculi.

Vitamins. Vitamins are essential for proper body function, but lambs require very small amounts. Only vitamin A is likely to be deficient. If lambs receive alfalfa hay or dehydrated alfalfa hay pellets in the ration, then vitamin A deficiency should not be a problem. Inoculate lambs with vitamin B complex to enhance their well-being.

Feeding Program

Under normal conditions, lambs will gain about one-half pound per day. Not all lambs will be fed to the same final weight because of differences in frame size. Large-frame lambs may be correctly finished at 140 pounds, whereas small-frame lambs may be correctly finished at 110 pounds. Learn to look at indicators of frame size—length of head, neck, cannon bone, and body—and estimate the weight at which a lamb will be correctly finished. If you know the approximate weight of a lamb at the time of purchase and the length of time until a show, you can calculate the feed requirements (light, moderate, or heavy) needed to enable the lamb to enter the show at its proper show weight. Monitor your lamb's size closely because correctness of finish will be the most important factor when you show your lamb. Remember, size alone does not make a good lamb: There are good little lambs and good big lambs. Your management program is the key.

You have a choice of feeding a commercially prepared ration, mixing your own, or feeding a ration that has been mixed and sold by the local feed store. If you are feeding one or two lambs, it is not feasible to buy all the ingredients to hand mix a ration. It is difficult to balance the calcium to phosphorus ratio and properly mix the feed. There are complete commercial rations available that do an excellent job. Remember there is no magic ration. Find a balanced ration, learn how to feed it, and observe how your lambs respond to it.

At the time of purchase, some young lambs may not be on a concentrated feed. Start these lambs on good, leafy alfalfa hay that is top-dressed with some feed. Slowly, over 2 to 3 days, change these lambs to more concentrate and less hay. Feed hay during the first part of the feeding program, but reduce it in the later stages to prevent lambs from getting a large stomach.

Breed differences will also play a major role in the feeding program. When all of your lambs are eating well and are comfortable with their surroundings, separate them based on condition, and feed them accordingly. Initially, lambs may be fed using self-feeders with excellent results. Self-feeders allow the timid, smaller lambs an opportunity to eat.

Once the lambs begin to grow and mature, implement a hand-feeding program. Feeding lambs individually allows you to know the amount each lamb eats each day. Monitor fat deposits closely throughout the feeding program. Adjust the feeding schedule to modify weight gain and body composition, but check the lambs progress so that changes in the feeding program are made as needed.

Adding a high-energy ingredient such as barley during the late stages of the feeding program can bolster rations that are not producing enough finish. This additive will reduce the overall protein content of the ration and provide the extra energy needed during cold weather.

Never make abrupt changes in the feeding program. Gradual changes are better and ensure that lambs stay on feed and continue to develop. The feeding program dictates how your lambs develop and mature.

A good feeding program will not make up for a lack of superior genetics, but it will allow your lambs to reach their genetic potential. A poor feeding program will waste a lamb's great genetic potential. Feeding is a daily responsibility; change the program as needed to maximize results.

To monitor progress, weigh lambs regularly. Know whether your lambs are gaining or losing weight.

Exercise Program

Feeding and exercise go hand in hand. Exercise is necessary to tone muscles and stimulate appetite. Exercise is an excellent way to condition your lambs and help control fat deposits.

You may simply prefer walking the lamb for short periods at a brisk pace. Whatever method you choose, make sure the lamb exercises strenuously over a short period of time, as an athlete would do wind sprints. In an exercise program, your goal is to exercise the lambs only long enough to get adrenalin running through their bodies. This process helps develop hard muscle.

Do not overexercise the lamb, as this can break down muscle. If you exercise the lambs too long, muscle gets torn down rather than developed.

Begin exercise programs 2 to 3 months before the show, depending upon the ration fed and the condition of the lambs. Do not make the mistake of exercising lambs before they are properly conditioned.

Preventive Health Program

The key to a healthy lamb is the development of a preventive health program. Assume that the lamb you have purchased has had no treatments, and consult with a veterinarian for recommendations.

Diseases or Conditions

Include vaccinations and treatments, if needed, in your preventive health program. The following information can help you identify potential health problems in your lambs as you observe them.

Enterotoxemia. One of the main causes of death in club lambs is enterotoxemia, or overeating disease. Symptoms are seldom exhibited. The disease is caused by a clostridial organism normally present in the intestine of most sheep. Lambs that experience abrupt changes to their feeding schedules or that consume large amounts of grain are subject to enterotoxemia. These changes cause the clostridial organism to grow rapidly and produce a powerful toxin that causes death in a few hours.

Vaccinate all club lambs for types C and D enterotoxemia. Administer a booster vaccine 2 to 3 weeks later. Give additional boosters at 2- to 3-month intervals.

Internal Parasites. Internal parasites are a continual problem. Treat new lambs immediately for internal parasites. Follow with a second treatment about 3 weeks later. In hot, humid areas and when in close confinement, it is best to deworm every 30 days. Consult your veterinarian for recommended practices and information on the most effective products.

Urinary Calculi. Urinary calculi is a metabolic disease of male lambs that is characterized by the formation of calculi, or stones, in the urinary tract. The first sign of calculi is a lamb's inability to pass urine. The lamb will be restless, kick at its belly, stretch, and attempt to urinate.

Grains are high in phosphorus and low in calcium; therefore, high-concentrate rations without ammonium chloride may cause a problem.

Use a ration that contains ammonium chloride, and provide plenty of clean, fresh drinking water at all times to help prevent urinary calculi.

Coccidiosis. Coccidiosis causes weight loss and continued inefficiency in lambs. Bloody diarrhea, dehydration, weight loss, and weakness characterize the disease. Separate sick lambs, and give individual treatment as prescribed by a veterinarian. Use a preventative in the drinking water. Most commercial show rations are medicated with a coccidiostat, which will help control coccidiosis.

Soremouth. Soremouth is a contagious disease that causes the formation of scabs on the lips and around the mouth of lambs. A virus that can affect humans causes it. Use caution when working with lambs with soremouth. Rub iodine into lesions after the scabs are removed to help dry up the area and reduce the infection. A live-virus vaccine is available that helps prevent soremouth.

Tetanus. Lambs affected with tetanus seldom recover because there is no satisfactory treatment. Check with the producer to be sure that lambs are vaccinated for tetanus. Producers who use elastrator bands to dock tails or castrate should vaccinate for tetanus. Combination vaccines are available for tetanus and enterotoxemia; most producers use them in their health programs.

Ringworm or Club Lamb Fungus. This can become a serious problem because it is contagious and can be transmitted from lamb to lamb, from lamb to human, or from infected equipment to lamb. A good prevention program is necessary. Products available for use produce varying results. Consult a veterinarian for assistance in treatment and prevention.

Rectal Prolapse. Rectal prolapse, or protrusion of the rectum, can be inherited. It also is associated with concentrate feeding and excessive coughing induced by dusty conditions. Contact a veterinarian for prompt treatment. If unattended, a prolapsed rectum becomes swollen, inflamed, and covered with crusted blood, fibrin, and feces. This condition leads to further problems by allowing secondary infections and a generally weakened condition in the lamb.

Drugs

State and federal laws and regulations concerning the use of drugs for livestock and poultry are established to protect human and animal health. These laws and regulations state that instructions and restrictions on product labels must be strictly followed. The labels state the species or class of livestock or poultry for which the drug is to be used, the recommended route of administration, the approved dosage rate, and the specific conditions to be treated. When administering drugs, always follow label instructions.

The Food and Drug Administration regulates the use of a drug when it is used in a manner other than what is stated on its label. The alternate use of a drug may be prescribed only under the authority of a licensed veterinarian. The veterinarian assumes responsibility for making medical judgments, and you as the client agree to follow the instructions strictly.

Hoof Trimming

Hoof trimming is also necessary for a good health management program. Trim hooves every 4 to 6 weeks. Always trim hooves at least 1 week before a show. If you cut into the quick and temporarily cripple the lamb, the lamb will have time to heal before the show.

Observations

Careful daily observation of your lambs is a good preventive measure. Lambs that do not feel well usually do not eat as quickly and may not eat all of their feed. Routinely check the manure of the lambs in the pen: Lambs with diarrhea generally have had their feed changed too quickly, have consumed too much high-energy feed, or have internal parasites.

Check to see how your lambs walk, and get a good impression of their overall vigor. Lambs that do not feel well usually walk abnormally and stand with their ears hanging down.

Daily observations help you detect lambs that are suffering from urinary calculi or water belly. An affected animal stands with its back arched, strains to pass urine, sometimes kicks at its belly, and shows extreme discomfort. It is normal for most lambs to urinate after they stand up and move about for a few minutes. Watch your lambs closely to make sure they are urinating without problems.

Fitting

Fitting lambs for show requires more than simply shearing them. Wash lambs, regardless of breed, before shearing. A clean fleece is easier to shear and extends the life of clipper blades. Any livestock soap or liquid dishwashing soap works extremely well for washing lambs, but be careful to remove all soap when rinsing. Wash and shear lambs as close to the show day as possible.

Frequently shorn lambs tend to wrinkle or become loose hided. Use a blow dryer to hasten drying time. A bath towel is adequate for drying short-fleeced lambs in warm weather. Do not blow dry lambs that tend to wrinkle.

Shear a lamb's wool while it is still damp. Clippers perform better in loose, damp wool. Use a good brand of clippers, with surgical blades, to ensure a smooth clip and attractive lambs.

Shear lambs so they are smooth. While shearing, run the clippers parallel to the length of the body rather than vertical to it. Shearing parallel to the length of the body will make lambs appear balanced and longer bodied.

Do not shear slick the wool below the knees and hocks. Card out the leg wool and blend it in with hand shears or electric clippers to improve structure and bone appearance. Leave wool on the legs to improve the balance and eye appeal of lambs.

Use small animal clippers to clip closely around the eyes, ears, or delicate areas.

Immediately after shearing in cold weather, cover each lamb with a lamb sock or blanket. Provide a clean, well-bedded pen to keep lambs clean and dry.

Showing

You have worked hard to get your lamb ready to show. You have done your best in making the lamb's selection, in caring for its health needs over several months, and in fitting your lamb for show. Your preparation—planning and practice—has taught you many lessons and skills, such as responsibility and goal setting. You can be proud of your animal and of yourself. Good luck as you show your lamb!



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