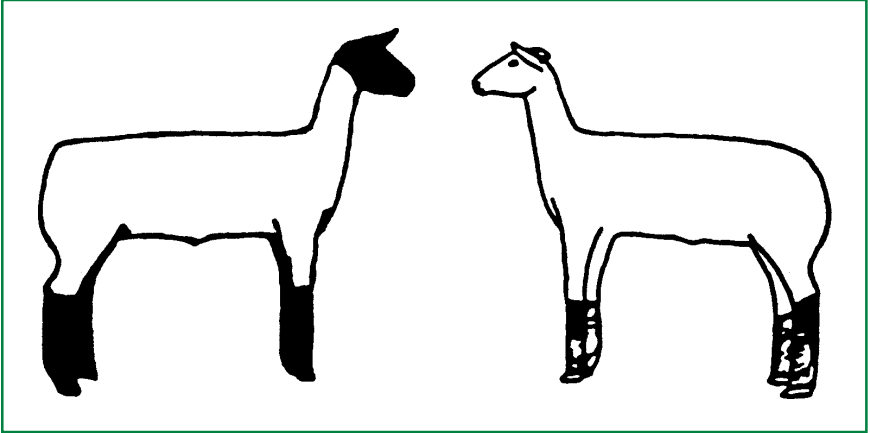




Texas Agricultural Extension Service
The Texas A&M University System

AS 3-4.059
10/98



4-H Show Lamb Guide



Texas Agricultural Extension Service
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Original cover art by Ross Stultz.

4-H Show Lamb Guide

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You have made the decision — you want to feed and competitively show a market lamb for your 4-H club project. The lamb that you purchase will join more than 9,000 lambs in 4-H projects across the state this year. You will join other 4-H members in devoting many hours over several months to the proper care, feeding and management of a potentially award-winning lamb.

Lambs may be purchased by private treaty at a producer's ranch or through sales. During the late spring and summer, there are usually one or more sales every week throughout the state. Information on lamb sales is available through magazines such as "The Showbox," "Show Times" and "The Purple Circle."

However, many of the decisions you make regarding the type of feeder lamb to purchase and raise, and how to exercise, feed and care for the lamb, will depend on the shows you plan to enter. Your first step, then, is to determine which shows to attend. Show schedules, rules and regulations may be obtained from your county Extension agent or directly from the shows.

It is your responsibility, as a potential exhibitor, to read the general rules and regulations, as well as special rules governing the shows you will attend. This information will tell you the number of lambs you may enter, the type of classification system used, weight limits, ownership dates and entry deadlines.

Show dates are extremely important. They determine the age and size or weight of the lambs to be entered and at what time of year the lambs should be purchased. Most shows require that lambs retain their milk teeth. Lambs generally hold their milk teeth until they are 12 to 14 months of age. Lambs without baby teeth are ineligible for show.

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Lamb shows also have weight limit requirements that must be met. Under normal conditions, lambs will gain approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ pound per day. Not all lambs can be fed to the same final weight because not all lambs have the same size of frame. Large frame lambs may be correctly finished at 140 pounds, while small frame lambs may be correctly finished at 100 pounds. You must learn to look at indicators of frame size (length of head, neck, cannon bone and body) and determine 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 that lamb to enter the show at its proper show weight.

Remember that size does not make a good lamb. There are good little lambs and good big lambs. Your management program is the key.

Facilities and Equipment

One of the major advantages 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 conditions and a small pen with outside exposure are essential. Adequate fencing, a feeder, a water container and an exercise area are required, yet other equipment may be considered optional.

Barns/sheds

The shed or barn should have at least 20 square feet of space for each lamb. The outside pen can be any size that is convenient. The facility should be well drained and should open to the east or south. Barn temperature is critical. Structures should be well ventilated so lambs will remain cool and continue to grow during the summer. On the other hand, when club lambs are slick shorn for shows, barns should be altered during the winter to keep lambs as warm as possible. This can be done by closing the front of the barn with a tarp or plastic sheet and by using heat lamps.

The illustration shows the recommended dimensions and layout for a feeding facility.

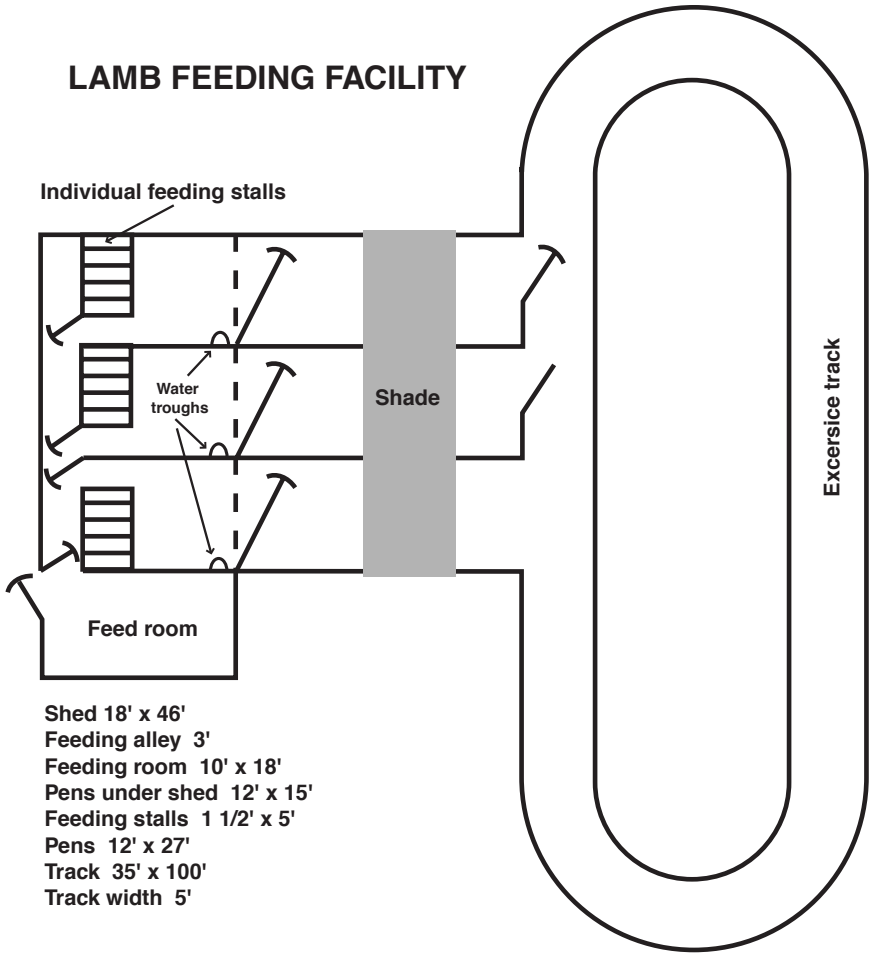
Fences

Fence height should be at least 42 inches to discourage lambs from jumping. Fences also should keep out predators.

Feeders

Self-feeders are often used in the early stages of feeding club lambs. Self-feeders should be blocked at least 8 inches off the ground. If lambs are hand fed, use movable troughs that hang on the fence at the appropriate height. A trough should be hung at the same height as the top of

LAMB FEEDING FACILITY



the shoulder of the lamb being fed. Movable troughs need to be taken down and cleaned regularly. Hay and mineral feeders also need to be elevated. The use of small, individual feeding stalls is an option that allows you to accurately measure the feed consumption of each lamb. This requires extra pen space and is time consuming. However, it is an excellent way to properly feed individual lambs.

Water containers

Fresh water is the most important ingredient in feeding club lambs. Water troughs should be small so they can be drained and cleaned on a regular basis. Troughs should be located in the shade to keep water cool. In the hot summer months, some lambs tend to drink too much water and appear "full." Water should never be totally removed from a lamb, but rationing water prior to a show will help remove the belly from the lamb and improve its appearance in the show ring.

Exercise

Exercising lambs is a necessity. One of the best ways to exercise lambs is with the assistance of a dog. If a dog is used to run lambs, a circular or oval shaped track or a square track with rounded corners should be used. The track path should be 5 to 7 feet wide. If the path is any wider, lambs have a tendency to stop or turn back on the dog. The outside fence should be at least 4 feet tall and constructed of heavy, tightly stretched net wire. The inside fence should be 4 feet tall and made of net wire that has some elasticity and is not tightly stretched. It is important to remove all rocks or obstacles from the path. Sand, cedar shavings or fresh dirt should be kept in the path to provide a softer running surface. Overall measurements should be no larger than 100 feet by 100 feet and no smaller than 40 feet by 40 feet. The ideal is approximately 70 feet by 70 feet. This is large enough for lambs to get a good workout, but small enough that you can control or stop your dog in case of an emergency.

If you do not have a dog, you may exercise your lambs using a bicycle or four-wheel, all-terrain vehicle. You may also chase the lambs yourself, however, this is very tiring for you and the lambs probably will not get enough exercise. Walking lambs with a halter does not give them enough exercise, but it is better than no exercise at all.

Equipment

To properly feed and exhibit a club lamb, it is necessary to have the following equipment:

- stiff brush to clean water troughs;
- shovel to clean pens;
- trimming table that measures 45 inches long, 20 inches wide and 18 inches tall;
- electric clippers;
- 20- and 23-tooth combs with cutters;
- 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;
- back-pack drench gun;
- small portable feed troughs.

You may want the following optional equipment if you are exhibiting several lambs at major shows:

- small animal clippers;
- hair head for electric clippers;
- show box to hold equipment;
- hot air blower or dryer;
- portable livestock scales;
- electric water heater;
- electric sharpener or grinder for combs and cutters;
- extension cords;
- muzzles;
- electric fans.

Selection

The selection of a lamb for a project is one of the most important decisions you must make. The type of lamb you select will have a major influence on the project's results. However, remember that a winning lamb is a combination of good selection, good nutritional management, a good exercise program and outstanding showmanship.

People differ in their ability to select animals. Some have a natural eye for selecting young animals of high caliber, while others may never develop this ability. Do not hesitate to ask for help from someone with these skills. It may be your county Extension agent, Future Farmers of America instructor, parent or another leader in your county. Also, many breeders are very willing to assist you in your selection.

When selecting a lamb, be aware of wool length and fat thickness. If possible, select your club lamb after shearing. Young lambs that are bloomy and fat always look good, while young lambs that are thin do not. Learn to look past fat and recognize muscle so 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 when selecting a lamb: classification, muscle, structural correctness, style and balance, and growth potential.

Classification

Show lamb classification relies not necessarily on the genetic makeup, but upon the animal's physical characteristics. These include color markings, physical structure, skeletal shape, and feel (softness) of the pelt. Some genetic traits of a breed are not always the most dominant, and it may be difficult for a lamb show classifier to recognize these

traits. When selecting a lamb for purchase, remember that you should be confident that the lamb will classify.

Classification guidelines are clearly established for county, district and state shows. A lamb must be typical for the class in which it is shown. There are four major breed classes shown in the state. They are finewools, finewool crosses, medium wools and Southdowns. The following Market Lamb Classification Standards were revised in 1998 by 10 lamb classifiers and will go into effect May 1, 1999. These standards may be helpful when purchasing lambs.

I. Finewool Breed Characteristics

A. Acceptable breed characteristics

1. Rambouillet, Delaine, Debouillet, or a cross between these breeds
2. Silky, white face that is narrow and clean cut
3. Silky ears, medium to moderate in size
4. Soft pelt
5. White hooves and legs
6. Horns may be present or absent

B. Discriminatory breed characteristics

1. Black or brown spots in the skin or wool on the body of the lamb
2. Freckles or pigmented areas of black or brown skin
3. Black pigmentation in the hooves
4. Black eyelashes

C. Absolute disqualifications

1. Coarse, chalky, white hair on the face, down the back of the hind legs, and in the flanks
2. Black or brown freckles above the hooves in the hairline
3. Solid black hooves
4. Harsh, coarse pelt
5. Black lambs
6. Surgical alterations other than redocking
7. Steep hip or tendency to show callipyge gene

II. Finewool Cross Breed Characteristics

A. Acceptable breed characteristics

1. Must be a cross with evidence of at least 50 percent finewool breeding. The other percentage should be predominantly Hampshire and/or Suffolk characteristics.

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2. Soft pelt that is characteristic of $1/2$ blood wool (60s, 62s spinning count)
 3. Mottling and/or some spotting on face and ears
 4. Mottling and/or spotting of legs below the knees and stifle joint
 5. Soft and silky face and ears

B. Discriminatory breed characteristics

1. Face, ears and legs should not be extremely dark or solid in color
2. Colored fiber (black or brown spots) in the wool
3. Absence of wool on the legs below the knees and/or hocks

C. Absolute disqualifications

1. Coarse, chalky white hair on the face or ears or legs or in the flanks
2. Harsh, coarse pelt
3. Black lambs
4. Surgical alterations other than redocking
5. Steep hip or tendency to show callipyge gene

III. Southdown Breed Characteristics

A. Acceptable breed characteristics

1. Hair color on muzzle should be mouse colored, gray to brown
2. Nostril pigmentation may be black to purplish-gray
3. Muzzle should be broad, head of moderate length
4. Ears of moderate length, covered with short hair or wool
5. Black hoof color
6. Dark pigmentation on hide and/or birth marks are acceptable

B. Discriminatory breed characteristics

1. Solid white color on muzzle
2. Dark chocolate color on muzzle
3. Coarse, chalky hair around eyes extending to and including the muzzle
4. Predominately pink nose with few black spots
5. Long, narrow nose
6. Coloration on ears
7. Coarse hair in flank

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8. Harsh, coarse pelt
 9. Open poll on head
 10. Striped hooves
 11. Black fibers in wool
- C. Absolute disqualifications
1. Speckled face or legs
 2. Horns or solid scurs
 3. White hooves
 4. Changing color of hair or pigmentation on head, legs, hooves or nose
 5. Total pink pigmentation of nostrils
 6. Black lambs
 7. Surgical alterations other than redocking
 8. Steep hip or tendency to show callipyge gene

IV. Medium Wool Breed Characteristics: This class generally includes the Suffolk and Hampshire breeds, plus all lambs that do not fit in the finewool, finewool cross or Southdown breed classes.

Muscle

Proper lamb selection also depends on muscling. Select a lamb that feels firm or hard muscled. The lamb should have a good expression of muscle from the shoulder to the rump. 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. Also, 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 travel and stand wide and 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 how “eye appealing” a lamb is. 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 a lamb

have a tight hide and be free of wrinkles. A lamb should never be selected in the wool, if possible. 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 up its head is the first one you notice when you walk in 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. Lambs that are extremely long in the loin and rump will have an advantage over others.

Nutrition

There are no magic feeds or rations that make champions. It is the total feeding 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 of the available information to decide when feed changes should be made. 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 carefully observe the lamb during the feeding period.

There are five basic nutrients required by all livestock. They are water, protein, carbohydrates and fats (or energy), minerals and vitamins.

Water

Lean tissue consists of more than 70 percent water. Clean, fresh water is required on a daily basis to provide the necessary fluids to keep the body functioning at optimum levels. If water is limited, feed consumption will decline. This can aid feeders at certain periods during the program by reducing the size of the rumen and making the lamb look trimmer.

Protein

The primary constituent 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. Lambs can be fed lower protein diets during the fattening stage and during the hotter summer months, when feeding high protein diets may tend to cause heat stress. Older lambs can be fattened on rations containing 11 to 12 percent protein.

Remember that lambs have a daily requirement for protein. If fed more than is required, lambs use excess protein for energy production. Using protein as an energy source is very expensive. Also, during periods when total feed intake is reduced, protein supplementation may be necessary to provide the adequate daily requirement for lambs.

Carbohydrates and fats

The most common limiting nutrients in lamb rations are energy-producing carbohydrates and fats. Inadequate energy intake will reduce growth and cause weight loss. An adequate supply of energy is necessary for efficient nutrient utilization. Grain and protein supplements are high in energy. Hay contains less carbohydrates and fats. In lamb rations, too much energy intake can be just as detrimental 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 for ruminants be fed free choice at all times.

Calcium and phosphorus are necessary for proper growth and development. They should be fed in a ratio of approximately 2.5 parts calcium to 1 part phosphorus. Feed rations that contain high levels of phosphorus in relation to calcium may cause urinary calculi, the formation of stones that block the passage of urine. The addition of ammonium chloride at the rate of 10 pounds per ton of feed will prevent urinary calculi.

Roughages are generally high in calcium and low in phosphorus. Grains are generally low in calcium and moderate in phosphorus. Most protein supplements are high in phosphorus and moderate in calcium. High energy lamb rations usually need calcium supplementation, such as calcium carbonate, to bring the calcium:phosphorus ratio to 2.5:1.

Vitamins

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

Health

The key to a healthy lamb is the development of a preventive health program. It is a good practice to assume that the lamb you have purchased has had no treatments. Therefore, the health program should include vaccinations or treatments for a number of potential problems.

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. There is a combination vaccine for types C and D enterotoxemia. All club lambs should be vaccinated with the combination vaccine, and a booster vaccine should be administered 2 to 3 weeks later. Additional boosters can be given at 2- to 3-month intervals.

Internal parasites

Internal parasites are a continual problem. New lambs should be drenched for internal parasites immediately. A second drenching should follow about 3 weeks later. Consult your veterinarian for recommended practices and information on the most effective drenches.

Soremouth

Soremouth is a contagious disease that causes the formation of scabs on the lips and around the mouths of lambs. It is caused by a virus that can affect humans, so use caution when working with lambs with soremouth. Iodine can be rubbed into lesions after the scabs are removed and this will help dry up the area and reduce the infection. The Texas Agricultural Experiment Station manufactures a live-virus vaccine that will help prevent soremouth.

Tetanus

Lambs affected with tetanus seldom recover and there is no satisfactory treatment. If tetanus has been a problem in your area, or if you use elastrator bands to dock tails, you should vaccinate for tetanus. There are combination vaccines for tetanus and enterotoxemia.

Ringworm

Ringworm 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. The following products have been used with varying results:

- Fulvicin® powder — as a bolus or used to top dress feed;
- Novasan® — 3 ounces per gallon of water sprayed on lambs, equipment and premises;
- Bleach — 10 percent solution sprayed on lambs, equipment and premises.

Rectal prolapse

Rectal prolapse, or protrusion of the rectum, is believed to be inherited. It also is associated with concentrate feeding, short docking of the tail or excessive coughing induced by dusty conditions. Prompt treatment by a veterinarian is recommended. If unattended, the prolapsed rectum will become swollen, inflamed and covered with crusted blood, fibrin and feces. If a lamb is in otherwise good physical condition, salvage by slaughter may be the most economically feasible approach.

Polyarthritis

Chlamydial polyarthritis, or stiff lamb disease, most commonly affects lambs from 3 weeks to 5 months of age. Affected lambs are inactive, reluctant to rise or move, and lose weight or gain weight slowly. If forced to move, they move with a stiff gait as though in extreme pain. After moving for a few minutes, however, the lambs will appear almost normal as the lameness or stiffness diminishes. Treatment relies on the use of tetracycline antibiotics as prescribed by a veterinarian.

Illegal 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 specific conditions to be treated. When administering drugs, always follow label instructions.

The use of a drug in a manner other than stated on its label is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration and may be done only under the control of a licensed veterinarian. The veterinarian assumes the responsibility for making medical judgements and you, the client, agree to strictly follow the instructions.

Most Texas livestock shows have strict policies against the illegal use of drugs and will disqualify animals if such drugs have been used.

Other care considerations

Tail docking, hoof trimming and daily observation are also necessary to a good health management program.

Many lambs that come from large range operations have not had their tails docked short. To prepare a lamb such as this for the show ring, it is necessary to remove one to four vertebrae from the end of the tail. This should be done as early as possible so that the tail will have time to heal. You may do it yourself or have it done by a veterinarian.

Hooves need to be trimmed every 4 to 6 weeks. Always trim hooves 1 to 2 weeks before a show in case you accidentally cut into the quick and

temporarily cripple the lamb. This will give the lamb time to heal before the show.

Careful daily observation of lambs also is a good preventive measure. Lambs that do not feel well generally do not eat as quickly and may not clean up their feed. It is a good idea to 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 may have an internal parasite problem. Check the lambs to see how they walk and get a good impression of their overall thriftiness. Lambs with their ears hanging down and walking abnormally do not feel well.

Daily observations also will help you detect lambs suffering from urinary calculi or water belly. An affected animal will stand with its back arched and will strain to pass urine, may kick at its belly and show 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.

Heat stress also can be a problem for lambs. Heat stressed lambs tend to stand very straight on their hind legs and appear to have the shakes or tremors in their rear quarters. To reduce stress, shear the lambs and provide a quiet, cool place for rest.

Management and Feeding

You have a choice of feeding a commercially prepared ration, mixing your own, or feeding a county ration that has been mixed and is sold by the local feed store. If you are raising only one or two lambs, it is not feasible to buy all the ingredients and hand mix the ration. It is difficult to balance the calcium:phosphorus ratio, add the proper amount of ammonium chloride and properly mix the feed. There are many complete commercial rations available that will do a satisfactory job. Remember that there is no such thing as a "magic" ration. Find a balanced ration, learn how to feed it and learn how your lambs respond to it.

At the time of purchase, many young lambs, especially range lambs, will not know how to eat feed from a feeder. These lambs should be started on good, leafy alfalfa hay that is top dressed with a preconditioning pellet. After 2 or 3 days, slowly change these lambs to the concentrate that you have chosen. Hay can be fed during the first part of the feeding program, but should be eliminated at the later stages to prevent lambs from getting a large stomach.

Breed differences also play a major role in the feeding program. The greater the finewool influence in a lamb, the more timid and wild it will be and the less likely it will be to eat when people are present. Because of these differences, finewools, crossbreds, medium wools and South-downs should be fed separately. When all of your lambs are eating well

and are comfortable with their surroundings, you should separate them based on condition and feed them accordingly.

Initially, lambs may be self fed with excellent results. Self-feeders allow the timid, smaller lambs an opportunity to eat. Once the lamb begin to mature and fatten, a hand-feeding program should be implemented. Feeding lambs individually allows you to know how much each lamb eats each day.

Fat deposition must be closely monitored throughout the feeding program. The feeding schedule can be adjusted to modify gain and body composition, but you must check the lambs' progress so that changes in the feeding program may be made as necessary. Rations that are not producing enough finish can be bolstered by adding a high energy feed during the late stages of the feeding program. This 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 more desirable so lambs stay on feed and continue to develop.

The feeding program will dictate how your lambs develop and mature. A good program cannot make up for a lack of superior genetics, but it will allow your lambs to reach their genetic potential. A poor feeding program can cause a lamb with great genetic potential to be wasted. Feeding is a daily responsibility and the program should be changed as needed to maximize results. To monitor your results, weigh lambs on a regular basis. Know whether your lambs are gaining or losing weight and know how much.

Feeding and exercise go hand in hand. Exercise is an excellent way to condition and tone your lambs, and help control fat deposition. Lambs should be exercised extremely hard and fast for short distances of 350 to 450 yards. In an exercise program, your goal is to run the lambs just long enough to get adrenalin running through their bodies. This helps develop muscle. If you exercise the lambs too long, you will pass this point and start to tear down muscle rather than develop it.

Exercise programs should begin 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.

Fitting

Fitting lambs for show requires more than simply shearing them. Lambs, regardless of breed, should be washed prior to shearing. The only exception to this is when lambs are in long fleece. A clean fleece is easier to shear and extends the life of clipper blades. Any livestock soap or liquid dish washing soap will work 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. Most of the major shows do not allow washing after arrival on the show grounds. Lambs that are sheared frequently have a greater tendency to wrinkle or become loose hid.

A blow dryer may be used to hasten drying time. A bath towel is adequate for drying short fleeced lambs in warm weather. Lambs that have a tendency to wrinkle should not be dried with a blow dryer.

Shearing can be done while the lambs' wool is still damp. Clippers will perform better in loose, damp wool. A pair of electric clippers fitted with a 20-tooth goat comb and 4-point cutter or a 23-tooth comb and 9-point cutter should be used to ensure smoother, more attractive lambs.

Lambs should be sheared smooth. While shearing, the clippers should run parallel to the length of the body rather than vertically. Shearing parallel to the length of the body makes lambs appear balanced and longer bodied. Wool below the knees and hocks should not be shorn. This "boot" can be carded out and blended in with hand shears or electric clippers. Leaving the wool on the legs also improves the balance and "eye appeal" of lambs. Small animal clippers may be needed to clip closely around the eyes, ears or delicate areas.

Immediately after shearing, cover each lamb with a lamb sock or blanket and hood. A clean, well-bedded pen should be provided to keep lambs clean and dry.

Showing

Showing market lambs is an art. Some people have natural abilities to show, but all exhibitors can learn techniques and improve their showmanship skills.

Preshow preparation

The amount of time required to train a lamb for show depends on the lamb, the physical size and experience of the exhibitor, and the intensity of training. Some lambs are easy to gentle and train for show, while other lambs are difficult and nearly impossible to train. Most lambs can be trained if enough time and effort are spent. Larger, more experienced exhibitors can handle a wilder lamb, while beginners need a gentle, well-trained lamb. Some exhibitors spend time training throughout the program, while others start an intensified training program just 2 to 3 weeks before the show.

Halter breaking is an excellent way to begin the gentling process, especially if you have several lambs. Lambs should be caught, haltered with a rope halter, and tied to a fence. Do not tie the lambs where they can hurt themselves and do not leave tied lambs unattended. While a lamb is tied, you can place the lamb's feet properly and get it accustomed to setting up.

After the lamb begins to gentle, you can start teaching it to lead. This is done with one hand under its chin and the other hand on the back of its head. Have someone assist you by patting the lamb on its dock whenever it stops. When you are comfortable leading the lamb, you can learn to position your hands in a way that holds the lamb's ears forward. This will give the judge the impression that the lamb is long necked and very stylish. Lead with your arm extended and with your body 1 to 2 feet from the lamb.

The next step in the training process is to lead the lamb without a halter and properly set it up. Set the hind legs first, then place the front legs, keeping the body and neck straight and the head in a high, proud position with ears up and forward. You should remain standing at all times. Do not squat or kneel.

After a lamb is trained to lead, set up and remain set up while you move around it, the lamb is ready to be taught to brace or push when pressure is applied to its neck or chest. A lamb must push or brace itself when the judge is handling it. A constant, steady pressure is desirable because it helps the judge better evaluate the lamb. Keep the lamb's front feet on the ground when bracing. A lamb can be taught to brace by backing it off a blocking table or by lightly tapping it on the rear when it moves backward. Do not overpower a lamb when teaching it to brace, or it may develop bad habits such as over driving or kicking its back legs too far back. Be careful and do not practice too much when teaching a lamb how to push.

After training is complete, you may wish to practice showing the lamb. You can set up your lamb and show it while someone else handles it, making sure the lamb responds. If the lamb responds properly, return it to the pen and do not overwork it. If it fails to respond, more training is necessary.

Realize that you may have only 5 seconds to actually show a lamb in a major show. If your lamb does not stand and push properly when the judge handles it, you may get overlooked.

Show ring

Your planning, selection, feeding, fitting, training and grooming have brought you and your lamb this far — to the show ring. Now, your skill in exhibiting your lamb — showmanship — cannot be emphasized too strongly! It is often the difference between winning and losing.

You should be mentally and physically ready to enter the show ring for competition. By completing the pre-show activities, you should have confidence that you can do an effective job in showing your lamb. You should be neat in appearance, but not overdressed. Do not wear a hat or cap and do not use a halter in the show ring.

Before the show begins, become familiar with the show ring. When the judging begins, watch the judge if possible and see how he works the lambs in the ring. You will feel more comfortable and confident if you know what the judge expects of you.

When the appropriate class is called, take your lamb to the show ring. If the ring stewards do not line up the lambs, find a place where your lamb will look its best. Avoid corners of the ring and leave plenty of space between your lamb and others. Set up your lamb, making sure the legs are set properly, and keep the body, neck and head in a straight line. Keep the lamb's head up and alert.

Do not cover your lamb with your body or block the judge's view of your lamb. Have your lamb bracing when the judge begins to handle it. Remember, a constant, steady pressure that keeps the lamb's front feet on the ground is desirable. After the judge handles your lamb, he will usually step back and look at it. Be sure to keep pressure on the lamb and keep its head up and body, neck and head in a straight line. Keep one eye on the judge and one eye on your lamb. It is your responsibility to watch the judge and not miss a decision.

A good showman must be alert and know where the judge is at all times. Always keep your eye on the judge! Remain calm and concentrate on showing. In large classes, it may take 30 minutes before the judge handles your lamb. Be patient and let your lamb relax. To keep your lamb calm, circle it, scratch it on the ear or rub its stomach.

When the lamb is pulled, never back it out of the line. Always move the lamb forward, remembering to keep the lamb between the judge and yourself. If you overpower the lamb and back it out of line, the lamb may stop bracing.

If your lamb is not pulled the first time, keep trying. Continue to keep it set up, remain alert and keep one eye on the judge. If your lamb is pulled, circle it out of line and follow the directions of the ring steward while keeping an eye on the judge. Move your lamb with style and at a steady, moderate pace.

Remember to keep showing at all times, because a class is not over until the ribbons are distributed. Be courteous to fellow exhibitors. A good showman will emphasize strong points and minimize weak points in a lamb. Remain standing at all times and always display a pleasant facial expression. Be a good sport, a graceful loser and a humble winner.

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Produced by Agricultural Communications, The Texas A&M University System

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Chester P. Fehlis, Deputy Director, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System.

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