

Management and Showing of Youth Market Lambs

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Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide information to leaders, parents and club lamb feeders for the development of successful club lamb projects. Since lambs are small, easy to work with, relatively safer for smaller youth than larger animals and demand a relatively small amount of space, many 4-H and FFA members have discovered that lambs are an excellent choice as a club project. Lambs provide a meaningful livestock experience in a relatively short time and can be an excellent way to learn life skills such as daily responsibility and the discipline to manage a lamb.

General

Once a 4-H member has decided to have a club lamb project, there are several factors that must be considered before beginning. It is the responsibility of each exhibitor to read the general rules and regulations as well as special rules governing the shows he/she will attend. This will tell the number of lambs you can enter, weight limits, ownership dates and entry deadlines.

The date of the show is extremely important because this determines the age and size or weight of the lambs and at what time of year they should be purchased. Most shows require that lambs have their milk teeth at show time. Lambs will usually hold their milk teeth until they are 10-12 months of age, but this time can vary. After this time, you are taking a risk that a lamb will lose his baby teeth, thus making him ineligible to show as a market lamb.

Under normal conditions, lambs will gain approximately 3-5 pounds per week. Feed conversion with lambs

varies greatly but usually ranges from 4-8 pounds of grain for a pound of gain. There are differences in frame size, and not all lambs can be fed to the same final weight. Large-frame lambs may be correctly finished at 140 pounds, while small-frame lambs may be correctly finished at 90-100 pounds. Keep these weights in mind when finishing a lamb as some shows have relatively narrow weight limits of 80-150 pounds.

Learn to look at indicators of frame size and growth (length of head, neck and cannon bone) to determine at what weight a lamb will be correctly finished. At the time of purchase, if you know approximately what your lamb weighs and how long it is until show time, then you can calculate if a lamb will have to be fed at a light, moderate or heavy rate to meet the weight limit requirements of the show you want to enter. Remember that size does not make a good lamb. There are good small lambs and good big lambs. Your management program is the key. Larger lambs are going to be more competitive for grand champions if properly finished.

Facilities and Equipment

One of the major advantages of a club lamb project is that young people can feed lambs without having expensive facilities and, with proper precautions, have little danger of getting severely injured. A barn or shed where lambs can retreat from cold, wet conditions and a pen with outside exposure are all that is necessary. The facilities and equipment needed for a club lamb project will be discussed in the following pages. It should be understood that a young person with a couple of lambs for a local or county show would not necessarily need all of the equipment listed.

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Barns and/or Sheds

Lambs need a combination facility if feasible: access to a shed and an area where they can get away from or in the sunshine. The shed area should have at least 15-20 square feet of space for each lamb. Generally, the pen should be at least 4 feet by 6 feet. The outside pen needs to be as big as possible to allow the lamb to exercise. Some youth have a jump between the feed and water to develop muscle in the lambs. The shed should be well drained so water does not accumulate under the barn. Sheds or barns normally, but not always, 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 months.

Pen Fences

Fence height should be at least 42 inches tall (preferably 48 inches tall) to keep lambs from attempting to jump and to keep dogs and other predators out. If you are using net wire fences, 12-inch mesh should be used rather than 6-inch mesh to keep lambs from getting their heads hung. However, the most desirable pens are constructed from galvanized livestock panels that are 5 feet tall with 4-inch square mesh.

Feeders

Self-feeders are often used in the feeding of club lambs. Self-feeders for market lambs of more than 30 pounds should be blocked up at least 8 inches (preferably 16 inches or higher) off the ground to keep feces out of the trough. It is usually best to feed the lambs on a ramp to aid in developing leg muscles. Ramps should not be used if rectal prolapses are a problem. Hand feeding lambs should be done in movable troughs which hang on the fence at the appropriate height. Troughs should be hung at the same height as the top of the shoulder of the lambs being fed, if not fed on a ramp. These movable troughs need to be taken down and cleaned regularly. Leads with a snap can be used to separate lambs wearing halters. Likewise, hay and mineral feeders need to be raised off the ground. This will help reduce the spread of disease, especially internal parasites. It is also important to make sure lambs are unable to stand in the feed trough as they will urinate or defecate on the feed.

Water Containers

Clean water is the most important ingredient for feeding club lambs. Lambs should not be allowed to defecate in the water, and the water should not be a source of disease. Water troughs should be small so they can be drained and cleaned on a regular basis. Remember that water troughs should be checked daily. Water troughs should be located in the shade to keep water cool. However, in the hot summer months, some lambs tend to drink too much water and appear "full." Water should never be totally removed for the lamb, but rationing water prior to the show will help remove the belly from the lamb and increase your chances in the show ring. Remember, do not dehydrate your lamb. The proper amount of fluids is vital to the feel and condition of your lamb.

Necessary Equipment

The following list of equipment is considered necessary for feeding and exhibiting club lambs. You may share some of the equipment with other members of your club, chapter or team. In most cases, it is better to share equipment to see how you like it before investing in equipment.

1. Shovel or rake to clean pens occasionally
2. Scales to weigh lambs (bath scales may work)
3. Trimming table with the following dimensions: 45" x 20" x 18" tall
4. Hoof trimmers
5. Electric clippers can be shared with others but are necessary and can vary. Options include 1) classic sheep and lamb clippers with 20- and 23-tooth combs and 4-point cutters, an all-purpose blade (close to the skin) and plucking blade (leaves 3/8"); 2) small animal grooming clippers with detachable blades for varying lengths of hair; 3) newer model lightweight clippers with blades for both fine and medium cuts; and/or 4) classic cattle clippers with surgical and medium blades. Many exhibitors elect to spend more money for the newer lightweight clippers that have less vibration and closer teeth so youth can use the clippers more easily and with greater safety. Electric cords, multiple outlets, water hoses and a hose nozzle are also needed.
6. Syringes and needles for injections
7. Lamb blankets and/or socks
8. Halters, lead ropes and a muzzle to prevent the lamb from eating high-fiber feed such as straw or leaves
9. Medical supplies as needed
10. Feed trough and water bucket
11. Wool card and brush

Optional Equipment – Additional equipment is often acquired by families who feed several lambs and exhibit lambs at several major shows. The equipment might be shared by a group of 4-H or FFA members:

1. Showbox to hold equipment
2. Hot air blower or dryer
3. Portable livestock scales
4. Multiple extension cords
5. Electric fans
6. Drenching gun and/or bolus gun
7. Medicine cabinet

Selection

The selection of a lamb for a project is one of the most important decisions made by a feeder. If all other things are equal, nothing beats superior genetics. The type of lamb you select at the beginning of the project will have a major influence on the results at the end of the project. However, you must remember that a winning lamb is a combination of **good selection, good nutritional management, proper grooming and outstanding showmanship.**

People differ in their ability to select prospective animals. Some have a natural eye for selecting young animals, while others never develop this ability. Do not hesitate to take advantage of a person with these

skills. It may be your county Extension agent, FFA instructor, parents or another leader in the county. Also, many breeders are willing to assist you in your selection program. Judges also differ slightly in the type of lamb they prefer. In more competitive shows, more stylish lambs and the lambs that are the best prepared and presented will place higher when all have the same amount of muscle.

When selecting young lambs, you must be conscious of age and fat thickness. Most will select lambs when the lambs are 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 months old and weigh 50-75 pounds. Young lambs that are bloomy and fat always look good, while young lambs that are thin do not look as good. Learn to look past fat and recognize muscle so you can pick those lambs that are genetically superior. As lambs grow, they are usually easier to evaluate.

Most lambs will be purchased at a market lamb sale or by private treaty from a breeder or lamb trader. Anytime you purchase lambs, it is important to know a little about the producer from whom you are buying. Do not hesitate to ask questions about the lamb's bloodlines, the age of the lamb in question and how its relatives have done showing. It is best for the inexperienced to select lambs that have been sheared, as a recently sheared lamb is much easier to evaluate for tightness of skin, thickness of skin and degree of wrinkling.

All lambs should have a scrapies tag, be polled or dehorned and be tail-docked. When selecting lambs, there are five major areas of emphasis that need to be considered. They are **structural correctness, muscle, volume and capacity, style and balance** and **growth potential**.

Structural Correctness

Structural correctness refers to the skeletal system or bone structure of an animal. Lambs should be up-headed, with the neck extending out of the top of the shoulders. Lambs should travel and stand wide and straight on both their front and rear legs, and their legs should be placed squarely under the body. They should have a strong, level top and a long rump with a slight slope from their hooks to their pins. Lambs should be heavy-boned and be strong on their pasterns. Open-shouldered, weak-pasterned or steep-rumped lambs should be avoided.

Muscle

Generally, lambs that walk and stand wide are going to be heavier muscled. Lambs should have deep, heavily muscled legs and rump, with the widest part of the leg being the stifle area, when viewed from behind. They should have a broad, thick back and loin that is naturally firm and hard handling. Lambs should be wide through their chest floor, with bold shoulders and a prominent forearm muscle.

Younger lambs don't have to be as well muscled as older lambs, but all must have adequate muscle. Lambs that are very heavily muscled and are coarse in their conformation will be discriminated against in the placing. The chest and forearm of a lamb are the best indicators of muscling in thin lambs.

Volume and Capacity

Volume and capacity refers to the relationship of length of body with depth of body and width of body. Lambs should be long-bodied with adequate depth and spring of rib. Try to avoid selecting lambs that are short-bodied, narrow and flat-ribbed.

Lambs should be at least 24 1/2-25 inches long from the top of the withers to the dock when they are 90 pounds. At 100 pounds, they should be at least 25 1/2 inches long. At 120 pounds, they should be 27 inches or more long. Ideally, they should be proportioned such that the rack is one-third of the length, the loin is one-third and the rump is one-third. Since the most valuable cut of meat is the loin, this should be the longest part of the lamb. Most often, the rack is the longest and the rump is the shortest.

Style and Balance

Style and balance refers to the way all body parts blend together, how the shoulder blends into the rib cage, the rib cage to the loin, the loin to the rump and how eye-appealing a lamb is. When viewed from the side, a lamb should be smooth-shouldered, level-topped, trim in the middle and straight-legged. A lamb that is balanced, pretty and holds his head up is the first one you notice when you walk in the pen.

Select lambs that are very long and tall with a balance of width, height and length. Lambs should be smooth in the shoulders, open very little at the top of the withers and straight down their top line. A slight slope in the rump is acceptable. However, it is very important that they be square in the rump and high in their thurls. They should also be deep in their twist (ewes don't have to be as deep as a wether) and should have a bulge to the inside of the leg. Great show lambs will be tight and thin-skinned and free of wrinkles except near the shoulders.

Growth Potential

The ability of an animal to grow rapidly is very important. Generally, the 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.

Use some individual judgment in selecting lambs, and try to get a slight variety among them. Select lambs based on the judge you are going to have. For example, is the judge one who goes for extreme length or extreme muscle? If breeds are to be considered in selection, select animals that are above average in size because weight classes may be very spread out.

Nutrition

A good feeding program uses all of the current information on nutritional requirements yet allows the feeder to make judgments when changes should be made as to the amount to feed. Feeding a lamb to maximize its show potential is not the same as feeding a commercial market goat, as the feed ingredients will normally be more expensive. A self-feeding program can be used effectively in the early stages, but show lambs generally need to be individually fed as they get close to the shows.

There are six basic nutrients required by all livestock – **water, protein, carbohydrates, fats, minerals and vitamins.**

Water. Water is one of the most critical nutrients in a feeding program, as it regulates the amount of feed a lamb will consume. Clean, fresh water is necessary on a daily basis. Water is an important component of the body as lean tissue consists of nearly 70 percent water, and all body fluids depend on water from the system.

Protein. The primary constituent of the animal body is protein. Dietary protein serves to maintain or replace 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. Fast-growing lambs need higher protein diets (18-22 percent) to allow them to grow and develop their muscle potential. Rations which contain 16-18 percent protein are useful during many phases of the club lamb feeding program, but rations lower than 16 percent tend to lead to fat deposition too quickly and should be avoided. (**Note:** Some data indicate that lambs, even when being shown, do not need protein levels this high. In commercial situations, lower levels of protein would be more economical.) Feeders need to remember that lambs have a daily requirement for protein. If more protein is fed than the lamb requires, the excess protein is used for energy. Using protein as an energy source is very expensive but much better than diets that are deficient in protein. During periods when total feed intake is greatly reduced, protein supplementation with a high-quality topdress may be necessary to provide the adequate daily requirements for your lamb.

Energy. The most common limiting factor in lamb rations is energy, primarily from carbohydrates and fats but also from protein. Inadequate energy intake will result in a slowing of growth and a loss of weight. An adequate supply of energy is necessary for efficient utilization of nutrients. Grain and protein supplements are high in energy. However, in lamb rations, too much energy intake can be just as detrimental as not enough. Monitoring the body condition of your lamb will ensure proper energy levels are being fed. For beginning exhibitors, it is important to periodically have the condition of your lamb monitored by an experienced showperson so that you learn how to check for fat on the lamb.

Minerals. The minerals of major concern in a lamb ration are salt, calcium and phosphorous. Calcium and phosphorous are necessary for proper growth and development of show lambs. They are of concern if the ratio or proportion of these two minerals in the ration is out of balance. The ratio in the ration should be at least two parts calcium to one part phosphorous. Rations which contain high levels of phosphorous in relation to calcium may cause urinary calculi, sometimes called kidney stones. The addition of ammonium chloride at the rate of 10-15 pounds per ton of feed will help prevent urinary calculi. Ammonium chloride is not very palatable, and some lambs may not eat it well. Legume roughages generally have greater than a

2:1 ratio of calcium and phosphorous, while grass forages will have slightly less than a 2:1 ratio. Grains are generally low in calcium and intermediate in phosphorous. Most protein supplements are high in phosphorous and intermediate in calcium. Check with your feed dealer if you have questions about mineral levels in your feed.

Vitamins. Vitamins are essential for proper body function and are required by lambs in very small amounts. Of all vitamins, only vitamin A is likely to ever be deficient. If lambs are receiving a high-quality show ration, then vitamin levels should be adequate. Some exhibitors will supplement with B vitamins and probiotics to ensure that lambs have adequate vitamins and minerals, but these supplements add to the costs of the feed. These supplements may aid in keeping the lambs on feed.

Feed the lambs according to their height and frame. Keep in mind they will have to compete against animals of similar length and stature, and try not to get them too heavy for their frame size. Some individual judgment will have to be used in doing this.

Keep all waterers and feed troughs clean. If any sign of green mold is present in a water bucket, bleach it immediately, allow it to dry and then start reusing it. Feed should not be left in the feed trough for more than one feeding. No old, moldy feed should be fed.

When lambs are being shown, body condition is very important. However, some lambs will become too fat during the feeding period. These lambs need to be hand-fed twice a day to control the amount of feed they consume. Conversely, if a lamb is too skinny, it will need to be fed extra feed. Some may be put on a self-feeder, while others may be fed two to four times per day to increase feed intake.

Most producers feed a commercial show lamb feed to their lambs. If a lamb is too fat, a low-energy feed such as oats may replace part of the ration. If a lamb is too lean, a high-energy feed such as milk replacer, cottonseed or commercial supplements such as Calf-Manna can be added to the diet.

The amount or quantity of feed may have to be adjusted according to your lambs as well as the energy content of the feed. Some lambs are more efficient in utilizing feed than others. A good starting point is to feed grain at about 3 percent of the body weight (BWT) and hay at one-half to 1 percent of BWT per day. Normally lambs are fed 3-4 percent of their body weight of the grain up to 100 pounds, but some lambs may tend to get fat. This makes it necessary to reduce the percentage to 2.5 percent of BWT per day and perhaps add a high-fiber feed such as oats. If the lamb is exercised extensively, it is difficult for it to get fat on two to three pounds of feed per day.

Some producers provide B vitamins, probiotics and special protein supplements to their lambs. Consult with your 4-H leader, FFA advisor or other experienced personnel before using these products. Such feedstuffs add costs to the ration and may or may not be of significant benefit to the lambs.

Health

A healthy lamb is important to the success of a club lamb project. Sick lambs are slow-growing and never reach their genetic potential. The key to a healthy lamb is the development of a preventative health program. Lambs purchased for a club lamb project should have been on some type of health program and have had a variety of vaccinations. Generally, all lambs should be vaccinated for overeating disease – types C and D every 6-8 weeks – and be on a deworming program. Additionally, a coccidiostat should be included in the feed.

Occasionally, lambs will be sick and have to be treated with antibiotic. Consult with your veterinarian on proper treatment for the lambs. If the lambs are going to slaughter, consider the withholding period when selecting the antibiotic.

Some diseases of importance are listed below. However, other diseases may be a problem. If so, contact your veterinarian or a qualified mentor immediately.

Enterotoxemia or Overeating Disease

A major cause of death in club lambs is from enterotoxemia or overeating disease. Enterotoxemia generally results in death and seldom exhibits symptoms. This disease is caused by a clostridial organism normally present in the intestine of most lambs. Lambs that have their feeding schedule abruptly changed or that consume large amounts of grain are subject to enterotoxemia. There are two types of enterotoxemia – type C and type D. Most often type D causes the disease. There are vaccines available for type D and for a combination of type C and D. All club lambs should be vaccinated with the combination (C and D) vaccine. At least two booster vaccinations are recommended following the first vaccination. The first vaccination should be given immediately after purchase or just prior to purchase by the breeder. A good vaccination program should eliminate losses from overeating.

Internal Parasites

Internal parasites are a continuous problem in club lambs. Newly purchased lambs should be dewormed immediately for internal parasites, and a second deworming should follow about three weeks later. There are few dewormers approved for internal parasites in lambs. Local veterinarians have the best information on which dewormer will be most effective in your area. Internal parasites build up a resistance to a dewormer if it is used over a long period of time. Rotating dewormers may be effective in helping to eliminate internal parasite problems. Generally, show lambs can be dewormed every month.

Coccidia may also be a problem and is usually characterized by diarrhea, possibly bloody diarrhea, depressed appetite and poor growth rate. If coccidiosis is a problem, then it is important to treat immediately with a coccidiostat and have a coccidiostat in the feed.

Below is a deworming program that is applicable to a single lamb or to a group of lambs. Since a male market lamb will be going to slaughter at an early age,

there is less concern with resistance to a dewormer than in a herd where the lambs may live for several years. A simple deworming program for a show lamb is to deworm with varying dewormers every month.

You must set up a deworming program and adhere to it. Worms not only kill both young and old lambs, they contribute to poor growth rates, an unthrifty appearance, coughing, diarrhea and other digestive problems. To minimize contamination of uninfected lambs, maintain a dry, clean environment with a sound manure management plan. Depending on location and density, deworming may have to be repeated at different times during the year.

General control recommendations for internal parasites in lambs include sound manure management by frequent removal of manure and cleanliness to minimize potential contamination. If a problem exists, rotate locations/pastures to break the life cycle of the worms if possible. Decrease the stocking rate if the stock density is too high. Feed lambs in troughs or racks that are sufficiently high above the ground to prevent manure contamination. Watering troughs should be constructed to prevent manure contamination, perhaps with a concrete pad around the base of the trough so that lambs cannot defecate in the water. Utilize high, well-drained locations, especially when the ground is wet. If the lambs are on grass, lambs should graze 4-6 inches above the ground to minimize exposure to larva of internal parasites.

Urinary Calculi

Urinary calculi is a metabolic disease of male lambs and is characterized by the formation of calculi (stones) in the urinary tract. The first sign of calculi is the lamb's inability to pass urine without great discomfort. The lamb will exhibit signs of restlessness, kicking at the belly, stretching and attempting to urinate. The most common cause for calculi formation in wether lambs is rations with high phosphorous levels. Grains are high in phosphorous and low in calcium; therefore, high concentrate rations, unless properly balanced, tend to cause urinary calculi. The most successful form of prevention is to provide at least 2:1 calcium to phosphorous ratio in the total ration. As a preventative measure, adding 10-15 pounds of ammonium chloride per ton of feed is very successful. Clean, fresh water will increase consumption and help prevent urinary calculi.

Soremouth

Soremouth is a contagious disease that causes the formation of scabs on the lips and around the mouth of the lamb. This is a virus that can affect humans, so care should be exercised when handling lambs with soremouth. Iodine can be rubbed into lesions after the scabs are removed. This will help dry up the area and reduce the infection. There is a vaccine that contains many strains of the organism and helps to prevent lambs from having soremouth. As this is a live virus vaccine, extreme caution should be used when administering the vaccine.

Ringworm

Ringworm can become a serious problem in the club lamb industry. It appears to have various types

and causes. Since most club lambs are shown in the same barns and show rings, it is highly likely that ringworm will become a problem. Ringworm is very contagious and can be transmitted from lamb to lamb to human to lamb or from contaminated equipment to lamb. Since ringworm is generally brought back from a show, a good preventative program is a must.

Several diseases related to skin disorders such as ringworm, wool fungus and/or a combination of related disorders may be a problem some years on the show circuit. It is critical that lambs with a skin disorder be isolated from others and treated promptly and properly.

Prescriptions from a veterinarian or a medical doctor are usually the most effective treatments but may not always work as the cause seems to vary. The following products have been used with variable results:

- Fulvicin powder given as a bolus or used as a topdress
- Sannox II – 10% solution used to spray lambs, equipment and premises
- Captan – 3 teaspoons/gallon of water used to spray lambs, equipment and premises
- Novasan – 3 ounces/gallon of water used to spray lambs, equipment and premises
- Chlorox – 10% solution used to spray lambs, equipment and premises

Pinkeye

Pinkeye is a contagious disease characterized by excessive watering and a clouding over of the pupil. Lambs are very susceptible to pinkeye, especially after being transported and moved to a new location. Dry, dusty pens and constant exposure to sunlight can be contributing factors. There are several medications on the market for pinkeye. Some vaccines may be effective, but check with your local veterinarian before using. If improvement is not seen within a few days after treatment, contact your local veterinarian.

Hoof Trimming

When lambs stay in small pens with no rocks, their hooves grow long and need to be trimmed. Hooves should be checked every two weeks and trimmed as needed. Always trim hooves one or two weeks before a show in case you accidentally cut into the quick and temporarily lame the lamb. This will allow the lamb time to get well before the show. If foot rot becomes a problem, it can be treated by placing your lamb's foot in a zinc sulfate foot bath (10 percent solution) and/or with antibiotics.

Castrating, Dehorning (Disbudding) or Tail Docking

Most lambs will be purchased without horns, a tail or testicles. Most lambs are naturally polled and don't have horns. However, occasionally a show lamb will have a scur or horn and should be dehorned as soon as possible. An electric or scoop dehorner can be used. A male lamb must be castrated to be shown as a market lamb. It should also be castrated as soon as possible after purchase. Contact your veterinarian or youth leader for help with dehorning or castration.

If a show lamb is more than 3-4 months old and needs to have the tail docked, it is usually best to have your veterinarian surgically dock the tail so that it is

very short and does not distract from the appearance of the lamb. The tail docking can be done with an elastrator band or other method, but the result may detract from the lamb's appearance. Additionally, improper tail docking can increase the likelihood of a rectal prolapse.

Management and Feeding

In feeding lambs, you have a choice of feeding a specifically prepared ration for show lambs, mixing your own or feeding a ration that has been mixed by the local feed store. Lambs are picky eaters and may prefer a pelleted ration over a textured or loose ration. The most important thing to remember is 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.

Many lambs may not know how to eat the feed you have purchased. These lambs should be started on good, leafy alfalfa hay that is topdressed with the purchased feed. After three or four days, you can slowly change these lambs to the ration you have chosen by decreasing the hay. Hay can be fed during the first part of the feeding program but should be restricted or eliminated during later stages to prevent lambs from developing a large stomach.

Some club lambs can be self-fed for the entire feeding period. If self-fed, do not allow the lambs to go without feed, or they may get too hungry and then eat too much causing digestive problems. However, some lambs will become fat and need to be hand-fed. Fat deposition must be closely monitored throughout the feeding program. The feeding schedule can be adjusted to modify gain and body composition, but the feeder must continually watch the lambs and check their progress so changes can be made. Rations which are not producing enough finish or lambs that are not putting on enough finish can be bolstered by the addition of high-energy feed such as corn during the late stages of the feeding program. Remember, never make abrupt changes in your feeding program. Gradual changes are more desirable so your lamb will stay on feed and continue to develop.

The feeding program for your club lambs will dictate how they develop and mature. A feeding program cannot make up for a lack of superior genetics but will allow your lambs to reach their genetic potential. Feeding is a daily responsibility and one which can be continually changed to maximize your results. To best monitor your results, lambs should be weighed on a regular basis. Know whether your lambs are gaining or losing and how much.

Exercising your lambs is a necessity and can be very beneficial to your success in the show ring. Lambs are very active animals and, if given enough room, will exercise themselves. Having objects in the pen for your lambs to jump and play on (i.e., big rocks, wooden spools, etc.) will provide your lambs with an excellent opportunity to exercise. Lambs that have been exercised will handle harder and firmer, which will give you an advantage in the show ring. Almost all judges will want the exhibitors to brace their lambs.

It is necessary to start exercising your lamb two to three months before the first show. Walking or other exercise should be for 20 to 30 minutes, starting with

limited exercise and then increasing the exercise. Extensive exercise should be for brief periods of time only. If facilities allow, it is best to allow lambs to run hard and fast for 1,000 to 1,500 feet as they finish exercising. However, do not exercise a lamb too long as the muscle can start to tear down. Use proper judgment as you play and exercise the lamb.

Fitting

Many major shows have a shearing rule for club lambs. However, there are some differences in the hair length allowable at the time of show. Therefore, it is important to read the show rules prior to shearing your lamb for a particular show.

Washing your lamb is almost always necessary before shearing. If washing is done, use a mild soap sparingly, rinse the animal thoroughly and damp dry the lamb completely. Brushing with a stiff brush on a regular basis is usually all that is needed on clean lambs. The brushing action removes all of the dirt on the lamb. Lambs should be washed before shearing to minimize wear on the blades.

Once the lamb is clean, it is time to shear your lamb. Techniques for shearing can vary, but shearing should improve the appearance of the lamb. Shearing must be done to match show rules and should be done periodically during the growing phase to see how the lamb looks the best. Shearing a week to one to two days prior to the show allows clipper tracks to even out and the pink skin to become less apparent. With practice and experience, shearing a few hours before the show may give the lamb a fresher fell. A pair of electric clippers equipped with a close-toothed comb should be used. There are many different combs and cutters available; however, it is felt that the finer-toothed equipment provides a smoother, more attractive lamb. While shearing, the clippers should run parallel to the length of the body rather than making vertical motions. Hair below the knees and hocks varies in grooming. Some trim it neatly; others brush it up ("card out"). Small animal clippers or clippers with fine blades may be needed to clip closely around the eyes, ears, pasterns or delicate areas on the lamb.

If you are shearing in the colder winter months, cover your lamb with a lamb sock or blanket immediately after shearing. A clean, well-bedded pen should be provided to keep the lamb clean and dry.

Showing

Like any other activity, some people are natural showmen. All exhibitors can learn techniques and improve their showmanship skills. Showmanship can be broken down into two parts: **pre-show preparation** and **show ring**.

Pre-Show Preparation

The amount of time required to train a lamb to show depends on several things: the lamb, physical size and experience and the intensity of training. Some lambs are easy to gentle and teach to show, while other lambs are more difficult and nearly impossible to train. However, most lambs can be trained provided enough time and effort is spent. Unlike goats, lambs

are not shown with a collar. However, a halter may be of benefit to a very young showperson.

Halter breaking is an excellent way to start the gentling process, especially if an exhibitor has several lambs. Nylon halters or inexpensive rope halters can be made or purchased from certain feed and livestock supply stores. Lambs should be caught, haltered and tied to the fence. If using a halter without a lead rope, you can snap the lamb's halter to the fence. Care should be taken not to tie the lamb where it can be hurt. **It is very important that a tied lamb not be left unattended until it gets used to being tied.** After the lamb becomes gentle, the exhibitor can start teaching him to lead. If you are an inexperienced or young exhibitor, use the halter to keep the lamb's head up while teaching him to lead. It is important that you have someone to assist you by pushing the lamb from behind whenever he stops. Teach the lamb to lead with its front shoulder even with your leg. The lamb's head should be out in front of your body.

The next step in the training process is for the exhibitor to lead the lamb and properly set him up. Always set the legs closest to the judge first. As a general rule, set the front legs up first then place the hind legs, keeping the body and neck straight and the head in a high, proud position. With younger exhibitors, sometimes the lamb can be trained to properly place its front or back feet so that only one set of feet has to be moved. Very young exhibitors may also use a halter to control the lamb, **if needed**, even during the show.

After the lamb is gentle and trained to lead, practice leading with your arm slightly bent and 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 stand as you lead the lamb, adjusting your body height as necessary to control the lamb and appear comfortable. When you stop to set up the lamb, set up the legs and then squat so that you do not distract from the appearance of the lamb.

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. **You may have only 15 seconds to actually show a lamb while bracing in some**

shows. If the lamb does not stand and push properly when the judge handles it, you may get a lower placing.

After the training is complete, the exhibitor may wish to practice showing his or her lamb, usually for 15 to 30 minutes. The exhibitor can set up his or her lamb and show him while someone else handles the lamb, making sure the lamb continues to be well presented. If the lamb responds properly, return him to the pen and do not overwork him. Exhibitors need to realize they may have only 15-20 seconds to actually show their lamb in a show. If the lamb does not show properly when the judge handles him, you may get overlooked.

Show Ring

Assuming that prior planning, selecting, feeding, fitting, training and grooming have been done, showing is one of the most important ingredients. **Showing can't be emphasized too strongly!** It is often the difference between placing in the top three or in the middle of a class of ten lambs.

The exhibitor should be mentally and physically ready to enter the show ring for competition. By completing the pre-show activities, exhibitors should have confidence they can do an effective job showing their lamb. They should be neat in appearance but not overdressed. Exhibitors should not wear hats or caps in the show ring.

Before the show begins, exhibitors should go look at the show ring and become familiar with it. If allowed, take the lamb into the ring so that it is used to the footing in the ring, especially if the footing is different from anything it has experienced. Once the judge begins, if the exhibitor is not in the first class, he or she should watch the judge and see how the judge works the lambs in the show ring.

When the appropriate class is called, exhibitors should take their lambs to the show ring. They should be courteous to fellow exhibitors at all times. If the ring stewards do not line up the lambs, the exhibitors should find a good place where their lambs will look their best. Avoid corners of the ring and **leave plenty of space between your lamb and others, usually 2-4 feet depending on the size of the ring and the number in the class.** Set your lamb up, making sure the legs are set properly, and keep the body, neck and head in a straight line, with the lamb's head up with alert ears. Always show with both hands. Do not put your free hand behind your back; use your free hand to keep the lamb's head and body straight. It is a good plan to have a parent videotape you so that you can see how you look in the show ring.

A good showperson must be alert and know where the judge is at all times. He/she also knows how the lamb looks. **"Always remember to keep one eye on the judge and one on the lamb"** is a classic saying! You must know how your lamb looks, where the judge is, and also where others are in the ring. Remain calm

and concentrate on showing. It is not necessary to fix your eyes on the judge; just be aware of where the judge is. In large classes it may be 10 minutes or longer before the judge handles your lamb, so you must be patient and let your lamb relax. "Practice, practice, practice" before the show is also a good rule.

Set your lamb up and be ready before the judge gets to you. Often, a judge will want a profile or side view of the class of lambs and then have the lambs set up in a side-by-side position. When the lambs are side-by-side, the judge will handle the lambs to determine their degree of muscle and body condition. **It is critical to be ready with a good brace on your lamb as the judge handles your lamb. The judge may feel of the lamb for only a few seconds.**

Be careful not to cover your lamb with your body so that the judge's view is blocked. **Always keep your lamb between you and the judge.** When moving, always go in front of the lamb and not over or behind the lamb.

After the judge handles your lamb, the judge will usually step back and look at the lamb. Be sure to keep his head up and body, neck and head in a straight line. Keep one eye on the judge and one eye on the lamb. It is your responsibility to watch the judge and not miss a decision. If your lamb does not get pulled for class placing the first time, don't give up. Continue to keep him set up, remain alert and keep one eye on the judge (be aware of what the judge is doing). If your lamb gets pulled, circle him out of the line and follow the directions of the ring steward, making sure to continue to keep an eye on the judge. Move your lamb with style and at a steady, moderate pace.

Remember to keep showing at all times. The class is not over until the ribbons are passed out. Always be a good sport and congratulate the class winner, especially in a small class. (It may not be practical in a large class to congratulate the winner, and it is not necessary to thank the judge or shake the judge's hand, especially in a large class.) Hopefully, the winner will be you. Be a humble winner and a graceful loser.

Summary

The market lamb project can be an excellent project for both a beginning and experienced showperson. It can provide you with experiences, memories and life skills that will benefit you throughout life. It is a combination of facilities, selection, feeding, management, health, fitting and showing that allows you to be successful with the project.

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