



## Indiana 4-H

# You, Your Club Lamb, and the 4-H experience

You've heard your friends talking about how great it is, you've seen the pictures, now you want to know, "What do I need to do to get involved with my local 4-H, and how much do I need to know about sheep???"



There are just a few steps you need to take to get from where you are now to get to the winner's circle:



## Choosing a site

One important decision you will need to make before buying a club lamb to show is to figure out where you will keep it. If you have the available land at your house, nothing can beat keeping your new friend at home with you. This helps to gain responsibility by allowing you to feed and maintain your lamb at all times. If the land availability is not there, you will have to arrange housing at a nearby farm. Many sheep farmers are quite willing to accept lambs for eager 4-H'ers, provided you approach them early enough and that you are willing to help out and learn. Some of your 4-H friends will also have land they use for their sheep, so talk to them and you might be able to keep your lamb with them. This is a good way to share responsibility and to learn and have fun at the same time. This may also be a good idea if you are only planning on getting one lamb, as

If you are planning on keeping the lamb at your house, there are a few plans to be made before you pick him out. Sheep are somewhat low maintenance animals, but shelter must be provided, especially for lambs with thicker wool in warm environments. Another factor to keep in mind before committing the lamb to your house is feed/water. Your best bet is to talk to your local feed provider and he will advise you on the best feed to use to get the most out of your lamb. Chances are that the feed supply will have an all inclusive feed, incorporating any necessary nutrients. Your feed provider/local co-op will also work with you to devise a feeding schedule, including both the grain and a roughage diet.

Feed is important, but nothing compares to the necessity of water. Your lamb will need a constant supply of fresh, clean water in order to stay healthy and grow at a constant rate.



## Choosing Your Lamb

You've joined your county 4-H club, you've decided to show a lamb, and you've figured out where you are going to keep your new little pet. The next step is the most fun, you get to go pick him out.

If you are a first timer in the sheep department, you probably haven't met a lot of the local farmers. Your 4-H leader will most likely have a list of local farmers that raise and sell club lambs. It is probably best that you go buy your first lamb from one of these recommended farmers, as they have experience with 4-H'ers, and most likely have a clean, disease free flock.

When all of the preparation is ready, it is finally time to go pick out your lamb.



When you get to the farm, chances are you will be overwhelmed by the number of lambs there. As a result, you should have a good idea of what you are looking for before you get there.

There are many different traits that should be taken into consideration when selecting your 4-H lamb. One very important trait is eye appeal. This is very important in the show arena because this is what will catch the judges' eye.

An eye appealing lamb should have a "tubular" look. This means that the lamb should be slender and have excellent conformation. The lamb should look like it's standing on a block. The shoulder should be higher than the rump, giving the straight-line smooth tubular look. "Tubular" also means having a longer body overall, from the brisket to the rump, along with a graceful and stylish neck. The brisket, or the

chest, should also be smooth, not bulky. The stylish neck should flow into the shoulder and brisket smoothly. The shoulder should be smooth and rounded instead of coarse and bulging. The lamb should be clean fronted.

There are many different factors that all go into a "tubular" lamb. One is muscling. One of the most important cuts, and the most expensive, is the loin. The loin and the rump should make up 1/3 of the lamb's total body length. To measure a loin, you feel from the last rib (the 13<sup>th</sup> rib) to the beginning of the rump. It should be as long or longer as an adults' thumb to forefinger spread of the hand. The loin should run smoothly with the rump, it should not look like there is a break between the two sections. The lamb should not have a pointy dock; it should be smooth and well rounded. The lamb should have a well-muscled leg because this is the second most expensive cut. The leg should present extreme muscle expression over his rump and down into his leg. You should be able to see the definition of the muscle when the lamb braces.

You should have a lamb that is structurally correct in both the front and back legs. This means the hooves should point forward, rather than inward, which is pigeon-toed, or outward, which is splayfooted. The lamb should not be bow-legged, which means they bend outward or inward. When a lamb is set up, it should look like they only have two feet from a side angle. The front legs and the back legs should have the same conformation.

All in all, your lamb should have an angular shape from front to back. The lamb should have an overall triangle shape, with the shoulders being narrow and coming into a wider hindsaddle and rump. The lamb should also be tall and long legged.

The top, which is the lambs' back along the shoulders and spine, should have muscle definition and be firm to the touch. The sides of the lamb should have adequate muscle coverage, without being too fleshy. You should be able to feel the ribs by touch but they should not be overly visible.

The most important thing you need to remember when selecting your 4-H lamb is that you will never find the "perfect" lamb. You should try to combine all of the traits together in the best possible format. You should also handle your lambs of choice adequately to see if you will be able to handle them in the show arena and also to see if they will brace for you.

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Disease is something you will have to be concerned with when choosing a farm to buy from, when transporting your lamb, while at the fair, and just in day to day maintenance.

The two most costly diseases to a sheep producer are [foot rot](#) and [Scrapie](#). With Indiana's temperate climate, we are susceptible to both. Foot rot is caused by two bacteria working in concert; however, you are only going to be able to avoid one of them. *Bacteriodes nodosus* is the infecting agent involved in the foot rot and is fostered by damp conditions and anaerobic environments. Even if the producer knows his flock is free of foot rot, it would still be a good idea to isolate your new lamb on dry ground for a week or so to monitor mobility or possible lameness. *B. nodosus* can only live in soil for two weeks assuming the soil is dry and free of feces from formerly grazing animals. When buying a lamb, here are some important considerations:

- Never buy sheep with foot rot or from a flock infected with foot rot, even if the animal(s) appear unaffected.
- Avoid buying sheep at sale yards or livestock markets where clean and infected sheep may have been commingled or run through the same area.
- Avoid using facilities (trails, corrals, dipping areas) where infected sheep may have been in the last two weeks.
- Never transport sheep in a vehicle that has not been properly cleaned and disinfected.
- Trim and treat the feet of all new arrivals, then re-examine them periodically during the 30-day isolation period.

Scrapie in sheep is similar to Mad Cow Disease. It is a disease of the brain, and symptoms occur usually between 2 and 5 years of age. Despite the late onset of the symptoms, it is a disease that is contracted early after birth and is most likely associated with contact with the placenta or placental membranes. Even if a lamb is born to a clean ewe, it is still possible for a lamb to contract Scrapie from other lambing ewes. For that reason, it is important to clean up after ewes when they lamb and dispose of bedding that may have fluids on it as well. With a club lamb, chances are you will never see a clinical case of Scrapie, but if

you should see unusual behavior, such as convulsions, aggression, incoordination, or even a "bunny hop gait," you may want to consult your veterinarian for an accurate diagnosis.

There are also a few other diseases in sheep that can be vaccinated for. These include [sore mouth](#), [overeating](#), and [tetanus](#). Again, you should consult your veterinarian as to other diseases that might need to be monitored in your area.

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- Once you have brought your lamb home and isolated him (if there are other lambs/sheep at the farm), you will want to enter him in to as normal a maintenance program as possible. Feeding at the same time every day is strongly advised, and it is important not to make any drastic changes in diet. Ideally, keep him at the same grower diet advised by your local feed store. This will keep him happy, and will keep him growing at the best rate.
- Contact your local veterinarian to set up a vaccinating program, and to make sure any and all medical precautions are taken care of. He can also advise you as to whether any changes need to be made on the farm that could possibly put the lamb at harm.
- Shearing the lamb will also be a necessary part of the 4-H experience. Most likely your lamb will need to be sheared twice. Once a little while after bringing him home, whenever his wool starts to get long/shaggy. And then once again right before you show, in order to bring out the muscling as best as possible in the show ring.
- Getting the lamb used to being handling as much as possible is also an important part to raising the club lamb. The better behaved he is, the easier he will be to show.

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