

# Lamb Guide

To assist FFA & 4-H members in raising a successful market lamb project.

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## ***Introduction***

Welcome to a very rewarding project program. The 4-H and FFA lamb project will help you develop skills that are important and relative to many future endeavors in your life. You will learn responsibility, time management, animal husbandry skills, sportsmanship, finance and record keeping-just to name a few. This project program also creates a family purpose where all members of the family can work together for a common goal. Good luck with your lamb project. We hope that your experience becomes a part of your lifestyle.

## ***Facilities***

lambs can be effectively raised in fairly simple facilities. Lambs need a living arrangement that includes protection from the weather in a barn or shed and a pen for exposure to the sun and exercise. Whether you are using existing facilities or are building a new facility, you will want to consider additional information to include:

- Project the largest number of lambs that you would have on feed at any given time.
- A minimum of 15 square feet of barn space per lamb and a minimum of 40 square feet of pen space per lamb.
- Arrangement of the pens that allows ease in working with the lambs on a daily basis.
- The barn should be open to the south and closed to the north.
- Proper ventilation- year round
- Feed and equipment storage
- Washing and Grooming facilities
- Lighting
- Adequate plumbing
- Base material in pens
- Access to an exercise track or pen
- Fencing for pens that is predator proof

It is normally a good idea to visit a family that is already in the lamb business to look at their facilities and ask for recommendations.

Your pens need to be ready to go prior to purchasing your lambs. Plan ahead.

## ***Equipment***

Lambs can be raised on a minimal amount of equipment. Several required items include:

- Feeders
- Waterer/water bucket
- Halter
- Blanket/sock
- Drench gun
- Brush
- Syringe/needles-(6 ml/ 18 gauge x 1" for most applications)
- Pill gun-small
- Hoof trimmer
- Tools to clean pens

Additional equipment may include:

- Blow dryer
- Clippers/blades
- Show box
- Scale
- Fans
- Trimming table
- Trailer or crate

The list of additional equipment may be available through your local 4-H club or FFA chapter. Ask your Advisor if this equipment is available for use. If so, make sure you reserve the equipment in advance so it is available when you need it.

These products can also be purchased at your local feed store. You can also check the web for used equipment by searching club lambs or show lambs and looking through the variety of websites that support the lamb project program.

## ***Selection***

The selection of your lamb is a very important decision. You have several questions to consider prior to shopping. These include:

- **Personal goals for success-** is your goal to simply “place” and make the sale or are you trying to win the “Grand Champion” of the show. Is it important for you to make a profit on your project, break even or is it acceptable to lose money? How much risk are you willing to take in terms of investment versus return?
- **How much am I willing to spend?** Lambs typically start out on the ***low end*** at about \$100.00 per head. The sky is the limit on the upper end with some bringing thousands of dollars. Research your market before you attend a sale or visit a breeder. You need to know if the lambs sold will be in your price range. This includes the lowest acceptable bid allowed at a sale and the low and high price range at the farm.
- **What is my projected return?** Know what the lambs will sale for at your local youth livestock shows premium sales or major stock shows premium sales that you plan on attending. Look at the percentage that “make the sale” at these shows to help you analyze your risk. Some local shows are set up so that every participate qualifies for the “premium sale” while others only “place” a certain number of entries or a percentage of entries. Many local shows in Texas allow you to sell your premium placing at the local youth show and retain ownership of your lamb. This allows you to show the lamb two times for profit.

- **What type of competition will I face?** Generally, the competition at local shows and state shows differs with the number of entries and quality. I have seen county shows that are as competitive as the major shows when you analyze the top end of the competition. Obviously, the major stock shows are very competitive and a large number of very good market wethers “miss the cut” and are loaded out for market price.
- **What type of lamb do I need?** Judges have different priorities in selecting lambs. Research your show and find out who is judging the show and what his priorities are in selecting or placing the lambs. Maximize your opportunity for success by purchasing a lamb that fits the judge that is judging your show.
- **What age should the lamb be?** Most market wethers range in age from 6 months to 12 months old when they are exhibited. All stock shows have weight limits and many have age requirements based on the lambs teeth. Find out what the bottom or lightest weight allowed and the heaviest weight that is allowed. Most shows have a “tooth rule” that disallows any permanent incisors. Lambs will usually lose their center two baby teeth that are replaced with permanent incisors at 10-12 months of age. Always make sure you check their teeth prior to going to the show.

#### **Lambs can be purchased several ways:**

**Show Lamb Sales-** special show lamb auctions where individual producers or groups of producers bring their prospects together for you to inspect, compare and buy. These sales sell the lambs to the highest bidder. They will always have a minimum starting bid. As mentioned earlier, find out if the sell will fit into your budget prior to attending.

**Private treaty sales-** set up an appointment with a Breeder and purchase the lamb at the farm. When you call to set up an appointment, ask the Breeder what the price ranges for the lambs will be and what the ages of the lambs are.

**Local auction barn-** most counties have a local livestock auction barn that acts as a commission agent to sell animals for area producers. These sells are usually held the same day of the week throughout the year. Call them for the time that lambs sell. This is an outside chance at finding a quality show lamb, but for someone that has the time to shop, could offer a bargain .

If you have limited knowledge in selecting a quality show lamb, you should seek advice. Agricultural Science Teachers and County Extension agents can assist you in your selection. Additionally, I have found that the successful lamb feeders in your community will normally go

out of their way to assist new feeders. Find the family that wins consistently and seek their advise.

Breeders can assist in your selection as well. Let them know up front that you would like their assistance in the selection process.

Another option is to use a trader that buys and sells lambs. These folks are sometimes referred to as Livestock "Jocks". They travel to sells and farms and purchase lambs to resale. The majority of these traders are very good in selecting quality lambs and you have the opportunity to see a variety of lambs from different breeders at one time without excessive traveling. Many traders will also assist with the feeding and fitting part of the program.

### **Selecting the winning lamb**

Whether you select the lamb or you have assistance, several factors are consistent with a good market lamb. These include:

**Structural Correctness-** this includes the skeletal system/ bone structure of the animal. Look for a lamb that is heavy boned, level topped and level in his hip. Note the lambs movement as he walks and look for the lamb that stands and walks out wide off of his front legs and back legs. Pay attention to the rear legs and avoid any lambs that might walk with their back hocks pointing in or out. Check the lambs pasterns, making sure that they do not flex excessively in their pasterns.

**Muscle-** muscle will always be one of the primary factors for success. The purpose of a market wether is to provide meat for consumption. Consequently, judges will prioritize muscle as a major factor in placing. A lamb that is wide based in structure is going to be heavier muscled than a narrow based lamb. Have someone hold the lamb in a driving position and handle the top of the lamb right behind the shoulder and across the loin. You want as much width as you can get. Analyze the rear leg muscle by watching the lamb walk away from you. Look for the width and depth of the leg muscle to compare.

**Volume and capacity-** this refers to the width of the body and rib shape. Lambs that are shallow in their body with a tight rib shape are not going to eat, gain and grow as well as a lamb that is deeper bodied with more spring of rib. On the reverse side, lambs with excessive middle are not desirable because of the waste in dressing percentage when they are processed. "Show lambs" have to have enough rib shape and capacity to be productive, but they also have to be shallow enough in their depth of rib to have that "show" look that the judges are looking for.

**Style and balance-** this refers to the combination of muscle and structure that gives the lamb that "show" look. You might own a show lamb with a lot of muscle and capacity, but if the lamb

does not have the right “look”, you probably will not win the class. This factor in selection takes time to learn. Generally, look for the lamb with a long neck that blends smoothly into the shoulders with a smooth and level top and level hip (few lambs are perfectly level in their hip/ avoid excessive steepness). The lamb should be “smooth” shouldered with a trim middle section. The underline should be level. Balance refers to the length of body in relationship to the height of the lamb. I have found that a lamb that is 2” longer than he is in height at the top of his shoulder balances very well from the profile view. (Length= measure from the base of the back of the neck to the end of the rump/ height= measure from the ground to the top of the shoulder). I also try to avoid excessively long bodied lambs as well as short bodied lambs. The longer bodied lambs will usually break in their top where the short bodied lambs do not balance well from the side view.

**Size potential-** all lambs will mature at different weights depending on genetics. Most shows have many classes broken into weight ranges. Each class has a winner. I believe that you should feed your lamb to his full potential and manage his weight at the end to fit into a desirable weight class. It is also important to match the size of the lamb to the size of the exhibitor. Younger exhibitors are better off showing smaller lambs. Tall exhibitors are better off showing heavier lambs.

As I previously mentioned- If you are not experienced in selecting show lambs, seek advise. Two opinions are better than one. Find knowledgeable assistance when you select your market lamb project. It costs just as much to feed a bad one as it does a great one and takes just as much time management.

### **Nutrition**

Lambs require six nutrients that include water, protein, fat, carbohydrates, minerals and vitamins.

Common sense feeding recommendations involves purchasing a commercially manufactured lamb feed. All major feed distributors will have a lamb ration that was developed through research to supply all of the feed nutrients needed by the lamb. Add clean water to complete the ration.

Many feed companies also offer a “show” line of feeds. Which feed you select will be based on your own experience or recommendations from experts. Find a reputable feed dealer that you want to do business with and choose the feed that will work for you. Your local feed dealer can also assist with recommendations and many support their customers at the local livestock show auction sales.



What to look for in a lamb ration- all feeds require the manufacturer to provide information on the feed tag. Look for the following guarantees.

Protein will range from 15%-18%- protein supplies the essential amino acids for muscle growth and development.

Fat will range from 2.5%- 4%- fats and carbohydrates provide energy. Increased fat may be needed for extra condition when you get closer to showing.

Fiber will range from 15-19%- fiber is very important in the diet for rumen function.

Minerals- calcium, phosphorus, salt should be listed. These will all be included in appropriate levels for optimal use in the lamb's diet.

Vitamins- Selenium and Vitamins A,D and E are normally included.

The feed tag will also include a list of ingredients and feeding directions.

Lamb rations also commonly include a coccidiostat for the prevention of coccidiosis. Common drugs added include decoquinate and monensin.

Most rations do not have any feed withdrawal required before slaughter, however, it is the exhibitors responsibility to assure that the lamb meets all withdrawal requirements prior to slaughter.

### **Health Issues**

It is important to have a preventative health program. The following health issues should be addressed.

Enterotoxemia- also known as overeating disease. Usually caused by changes in feeding which cause the clostridial organism to grow rapidly producing toxins and death. Most lambs have been vaccinated by the breeder. The lambs should have two injections- 21-28 days apart.

If you purchase a lamb and do not know if the lamb has been vaccinated, proceed with the proper vaccination procedures. Purchase Clostridium perfringens C&D at your local feed store and follow the directions on the label.

Internal Parasites/ worms: Lambs are very susceptible to internal parasites. It is recommended to de-worm your lamb when you first get it and establish a de-worming program every 21 days.

I recommend taking a stool sample to your veterinarian to verify if the lamb has internal parasites, and ,if so, what type. This way the proper treatment and product can be determined.

Urinary Calculi- this is a metabolic disease of male lamb which includes the formation of calcium stones in the urinary tract. Symptoms include restlessness, kicking at the belly, continued attempts to urinate. Balanced feed rations will have a 2:1 calcium/ phosphorus ratio and ammonium chloride added to the feed for prevention. Ammonium chloride can be added to the drinking water as a preventative in areas where problems exist.

Coccidiosis- this is an infection in the intestinal tract characterized by bloody diarrhea, dehydration, weight loss and weakness. Sick lambs should be separated and treated. One effective method of treatment, which can be purchased at your local feed store, is to use amprolium 9.6% drench. As mentioned earlier, most commercial show rations contain a coccidiostat for prevention.

Soremouth- this is a viral infection characterized by scabs on the lips and mouth. It is very contagious. Most breeders will vaccinate the kids to prevent this problem. If your lamb develops soremouth, you can effectively treat the area with iodine. Precaution must be taken when handling lambs with soremouth so that you do not infect yourself.

Ringworm/ staff infection- Skin problems resulting from ringworm and staff infections have increased in severity over the past few years with exhibitors showing at prospect shows. Contagious animals spread the skin infections to other animals through contact. Once the animals have become contaminated, extended treatment is needed to clear up the skin. I recommend that you seek advise from your local veterinarian for treatment.

The best policy in dealing with these skin irritations is to establish a preventative program.

This involves treating the animals and all equipment with disinfectants and fungicides after each show.

This has become a major issue with show lambs over recent years. I have seen infected lambs that never recovered after many different types of treatment. It might be wise to stop showing at prospect shows early enough to allow time to overcome these issues if they become a problem.

### **Daily Management**

Daily management involves a number of important tasks. Your lamb depends on you for proper care. Make it a priority in your schedule to provide the daily nutrition and care needed to produce a champion.

Feeding- you can feed your lambs utilizing a self feeder or you can hand feed your lambs.

The self feeder is used when the lambs are young and growing. This method offers feed to the lambs at all times. The positive aspect of a self feeder is that the lambs can eat whenever they are hungry which maximizes gain. The negative to the self feeder is that the lambs can overeat using this method, resulting in scours and treatment. In addition, if a lamb is off feed and not eating at all, you may not notice until the matter gets complicated.

A self feeder should be checked daily for feed and cleanliness.

Hand feeding involves feeding each lamb separate. The advantage of this method is that you know exactly how much each lamb is eating each day. You can also control the amount of feed that is fed from small amounts to full feed. A disadvantage to hand feeding is that each lamb needs a separate pen. If you are hand feeding your lambs, you need to be consistent and feed the same time every day with a minimum of two feedings per day.

Full feed for lambs is estimated at 3.5% of their body weight daily. Simply multiply the lambs weight by .035 to determine the amount. Note that some lambs can consume more than 3.5% per day. Adjust the amount of feed according to the lambs intact and desired gain. 2% of the body weight is considered a maintenance ration- this would be used to “hold” the lamb and prevent excessive weight gain.

Water- Clean the water bucket and fill with clean water daily.

Pens- Clean the pens on a daily basis to improve health conditions and minimize fly problems. The method of cleaning the pens will depend on the type a material you have in your pens.

Walking your lambs-

Halter Breaking & Leading- I like to start by halter breaking the lambs. I will halter the lamb and tie them to a fence or drop ( a chain suspended from the roof with a rubber strap attached) . It is very important that you stay with them during this procedure. They will usually fight pretty hard which may include jumping and falling. Make sure that there are no objects close by that they can run into and injure themselves. In the beginning- keep it short. After the lamb stops fighting the rope and stands still, let them go and repeat the next day. After a few days, the lamb will stand tied to the halter without fighting. They are now “halter broke”.

The next step is to teach them to lead. This can be very frustrating. It usually does not work well to pull on the halter. The lamb has a natural reaction to pull back when you pull on his head. It works better to stand beside or behind the lamb and let the lamb walk forward, controlling him with the end of the halter. It will usually take several attempts to teach the lamb to walk with the halter.

The lamb must be trained to walk by hand control for showing. After the lamb has been trained to lead on a halter, begin walking the lamb by holding his head with two hands. Make sure you keep his neck at a 90 degree angle out of his shoulders, ears up and forward and his head level. You need to walk beside his front shoulder with the lamb on your right side.

Driving the lamb- “driving or bracing” is an accepted practice in showing lambs to maximize their muscle expression. If you are unable to drive your lamb during the competition, you place yourself and your lamb in a definite disadvantage.

After the lamb has learned to walk, you should start working with the lamb to drive. This involves moving to the front of the lamb, placing your leg into the front shoulder of the lamb and pushing into the lamb. The lamb “drives” when he learns to push back into you. The proper procedure includes:

- stop walking your lamb with all four feet square.
- step in front of the lamb and control his neck and head to be held upright and forward while you set his front two feet square and then place his rear legs square.
- step into the lamb with your left leg braced into the right shoulder of the lamb with the lambs neck stretched up your leg and his head held level and looking forward in a comfortable position.
- slightly push into the front of the lamb to make him drive back into your leg. The harder you push, the harder the lamb should drive.
- there should be minimal pressure on the lambs head and his neck should be straight and in-line with his body.

### **Fitting**

Fitting involves preparing the lamb for the show. The first item of importance is to acquire a copy of the rules for the stock show you are planning on attending and read the rules concerning the fitting of the lambs.

The majority of the shows require that the lamb be slick sheared from the hocks/ knees up.

**Shearing-** as it may sound simple, shearing methods will differ among exhibitors. I like to experiment ahead of time to find the right procedure to use. For those that show at a lot of prospect shows, practice makes perfect and they will know what works the best.

Helpful hints:

- Lambs do not like water. Take your time and be gentle when washing and do a thorough job of getting the goat clean and rinsing out all of the soap. Do not get water in the Lamb's ears.
- Make sure your lamb has been on a shearing table and has been sheared several times prior to shearing for the show. Practice makes perfection.
- Do not shear the day of the show. The lamb will get tired and you will normally have clipper tracks in the hide.
- Freshly sheared lambs can sunburn easily. Put on a sock or blanket or keep the lamb out of the sunlight. Animal sun-block products can also be used and are available at your local feed store.
- Shear with both fine blades and surgical blades at home while practicing to see which blade provides the best "handle". Do not wait until the show to determine which blade you should use. All lambs "shear out" different. Do your homework.

#### Steps to shearing:

- 1) Wash the lamb with a mild livestock shampoo and rinse. Repeat.
- 2) Apply a conditioner, let set and rinse.
- 3) Towel dry the lamb/
- 4) Secure the lamb on a trimming table.
- 5) Shear the lamb- I like to start at the rear hock and shear up towards the back. Repeat for the front leg- knee up to the back. Shear the back and sides forward from the tail to the neck. Shear the neck from the shoulders and brisket- up and forward towards the head.

Shear the inside of the back leg from the hock up. Shear the underline to include between the front legs. Shear the head last. Wool will be left on the legs from the hock/knee down.

- 6) Block the leg wool
- 7) Rinse the lamb.
- 8) Apply a skin conditioner.
- 9) Blanket or sock the lamb
- 10) Return to a clean and dry pen.

## Showmanship

It does not matter how good of a lamb you have raised if you do not possess the skills to present the lamb to judge. Showmanship wins shows. Showmanship skills must be developed and practiced continually. If you are a beginner, check with your local 4-H leaders, County Agents or Agricultural Science instructors to see if any show clinics are planned. If none have been planned, ask them if they can put one together. You can also look for a veteran exhibitor in your club or chapter and ask them if they would assist you in learning how to show.

Practice, practice, practice. Set up a weekly schedule that includes walking and showing your lambs several days a week. Make sure you train your lamb to stand and drive for long periods of time so that he does not stop showing on you after a short period of time. Plan ahead and make sure that your parents know when you want to practice so that they can assist.

Attend as many prospect shows as you can. Not only will you improve with every show, but you will train your lambs to handle the stress of traveling and perfect their show ring presence. Additionally, the more you show, the more you will get to visit with other exhibitors and share and learn information about your lamb project.

Prior to attending your County Youth Show or Major Show, your lamb should be trained to perfection. It is difficult enough to win a County Show or place at Major Show without any showmanship mistakes, let alone, with mistakes. Be prepared to show flawlessly.

Have complete knowledge of your project and know the answers to any questions that the judge could ask in a market class or showmanship class.

What your lamb needs to be trained to do:

- Walk on command. The lamb should be at your right side with his head slightly in front of you. His neck should be extended out of his shoulder and his head should be level.
- Stop on command with all four feet set square.
- Drive on command for extended periods of time.
- Stand still for extended periods of time.

Show Ring expectations:

- Dress properly- jeans, a collared shirt and shoes or boots will work fine. Some exhibitors like to wear a bright colored shirt to catch the judge's eye. Establish your "show clothes" ahead of time and be dressed and ready to show when the time arises.

- Avoid tennis shoes and t-shirts. Avoid overdressing- be practical.
- If the show ring is available the night before the show or the morning before the show, take your lamb into the ring and go through a quick show ring workout ahead of time.
- Know how the judge works the ring. If you are not in the first class of the day, watch a class or two prior to showing so that you will know exactly what to expect when you get in the ring. If you are in the first class, ask the ring steward how they plan on working the ring.
- Be on time. I believe it is an advantage to enter the ring first for two reasons. First, we all know that lambs follow easy, but sometimes do not like to lead the way. If your lamb walks perfect, as he should, you will set the example for the class, and, undoubtedly get a very good look from the judge. Secondly, since you are in the front of the line, you will not have to move up and reset your lamb continually if the judge uses a bottom end pulling method of judging (as most do).
- If you are lined up in between lambs to enter the ring, pause prior to entering and give yourself a little room behind the lamb in front of you. Lamb have a tendency to stop and go. You want to avoid having to do so yourself. It is to your advantage to keep your lamb walking.
- Whether you initially set up on a rear view or profile, give yourself enough room to present your lamb without getting hid by the lambs on either side of you.
- Set your lamb up as quickly as possible. You never want the judge to see your lamb out of show position.
- Never get stuck in a corner. If you do, move your lamb to another position. On the other hand, if the judge has already handled your lamb, it is not advisable to move out of your position in line.
- Relax when the judge is on the other end of the ring. Keep your lamb set correctly, but avoid continually driving the lamb at all times so that the lamb does not wear out on you.
- Show confidence- attitude is important. Know that you are going to win the class. Acknowledge the judge with eye contact and a smile. Answer questions in complete sentences.

- Never stop showing. Even when the class placing has been established and especially if you won the class. You never want the judge to see your lamb when he does not look his very best.
- If applicable, thank the judge and shake his hand.
- Always exhibit friendly showmanship skills- be humble when you win and gracious if you lose. Do not over react to any situation.
- Walk the lamb out of the ring and out of other exhibitors path prior to changing halters or transferring to your parents.
- After the show is over, thank your parents, adult leaders, Teachers and Agents for their help. I also think it is a great idea to thank the show officials for their efforts in hosting the show.
- Have fun.

### **Conclusion**

The market lamb project is a very rewarding program that allows the entire family to work together for a common cause. You should establish the goals that you want to achieve prior to purchasing your lambs and develop a daily maintenance schedule to maximize your chances for success. Hard work and perseverance pays off.

I am sure that you will have fun and enjoy the family time shared and success that can be achieved with this project program

Good Luck.