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Raising Your 4-H Sheep

W. E. Morris

Good breeding + good feeding + good management = success in the lamb project. You can show your ability in sheep raising by combining these three.

Good breeding means that the lamb you select is a basically good animal. Only a lamb of known quality can make good use of the feed you give it.

Good feeding means that you give your lamb the best possible chance to grow by giving him a good combination of feeds.

Good management means that you give your lamb the care that he needs to carry out his promise of being a top-notch.

How to Select Your Lamb

If you get the lamb from your own ewe. If you decide to raise a lamb from your own ewe, you should make sure that the ewe is the best type for her breed. That way you can expect the lamb to be of good type.

Be sure that the ewe has thick flesh, a deep body, a straight top with a comparatively short neck, an even body width throughout, and a plump leg. She should be short on her legs and have a good width between her front and hind legs. Don't pick a rangy ewe.

If the ewe you pick is from the medium-wooled breeds, be sure that her fleece is reasonably fine and dense, of good quality, and free from black fiber.

The sire of your lamb is important, too. Be sure that the ram is registered and also that he is of a desirable type, showing good breed type and character.

He should be rugged, masculine, and clean-cut, and he should have the body shape and wool covering typical of his

breed. For example, if he is a Shropshire, he must be boxlike, built close to the ground, dense and compact, of medium size, and he must have a woolly face and a pink skin with no black fibers in his fleece.

If you buy the lamb. Choose a strong, vigorous animal of good size for its age. It should have a wide, deep body with even lines throughout, a short plump neck, strong back, good spring of rib, wide loin, and heavy legs. Be sure that the legs are straight and well placed under the body. The breed type of the lamb is also important, so watch for typical characteristics of his breed.

Age. The time a lamb is born is not nearly so important generally in raising sheep for market as it is in showing. Actually the lamb with the most quality and finish will place highest in the show ring regardless of age. But the older lambs (born in February or March) have the advantage of size and possibly of market condition at the time of showing. Naturally they will be preferred to younger lambs even if the two have the same quality.

However, you will usually do better with an April or May lamb than with a February or March lamb for the fat lamb project. The earlier ones become too large by the time of the Junior Livestock Show.

Sex. Your choice of a male or female lamb should depend on your purpose. If you want a market animal you want a wether, but if you intend to enlarge your flock you want an ewe lamb. In the ewe lamb project early-born lambs have advantages in size and condition.

Another point to remember is that only wethers can go to the Junior Livestock Show, while only ewes can go to the State Fair.

How to Care for the Ewe

When the ewe is pregnant

Feeding. If you want a vigorous lamb for your project, you must feed the ewe carefully during the winter. A good winter ration is alfalfa hay with a small amount of juicy feed—for example, two pounds of silage or roots with a half pound of grain.

Another way you can help to make your ewe strong and healthy is to feed her extra grain shortly before the lamb comes. Start about one month before lambing to add this extra grain—increasing the ration to as much as 1½ pounds a day. This extra grain will make the ewe milk better, and your lamb will do best when he is getting plenty of mother's milk.

BUT be sure to slack down on the feed for your ewe two or three days before lambing. If you keep on feeding her heavily, she may have too much milk and then have udder trouble. The lamb could get scours from your over-feeding the mother, too.

You can tell if the ewe is getting the right amount of feed if she is in a rather laxative condition.

Care. Feed is not the only thing that is important to a pregnant ewe. You must also give her especially good care. For example, be sure that she is protected from cold rain and storms. And she should also have plenty of exercise so she will be vigorous and healthy and so her lamb will be vigorous and healthy, too. If you don't give her this exercise (and also, if you don't feed her right) she may get weak and even paralyzed just before lambing.

Another point to remember in caring for the pregnant ewe is this: don't let her run with cattle or hogs or she may be run over, kicked, or hurt in some other way.

Lambing Time

Care. Two or three days before lambing, take the ewe away from the flock and put her in her own pen. This pen should be clean and well bedded.

Finally the day will arrive when your lamb is born, and you will want to be especially careful at that time. Right after the lamb is born, cut the lamb's naval cord so as to leave a stub about four inches long. Then dip this stub in iodine.

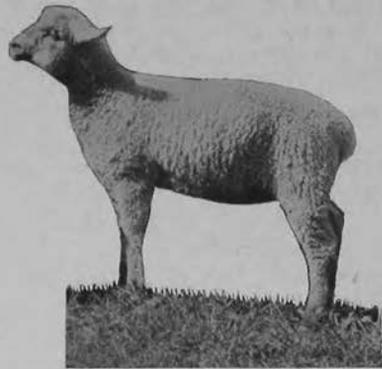
Another job for you to do immediately after the lamb is born is to draw a little milk from the ewe's udder to be sure that the teats are all in good working order. You can also give the lamb a good start by helping him to nurse, for that is a job that he doesn't do very well at the very first.

During the time when the lamb is nursing, watch the udders of the ewe carefully. If they become swollen, first milk them out and then apply hot cloths or massage them with camphorated oil in order to reduce the swelling. Another good treatment is this: soak pads of cotton in a solution of Epsom salts dissolved in water as hot as the back of your hand can stand, and apply these pads over the entire udder. Then cover it with a cloth.

Feeding. Don't worry if the ewe won't eat for a few hours after she has her



Left, good mutton form—broad back, width, and depth of quarters.



For club work select lambs like the one on the left, with full heart girth, good depth of body, and thickness throughout.

lamb. She will be ready to eat later, and three or four days afterward she should be back in stride again. Give her plenty of nourishing feed then in order to help her milk to flow. Actually this good flow is necessary for the lambs from the time they are only a few hours old until they are turned out on pasture.

So feed the ewe all the alfalfa or clover hay she will eat, together with enough grain to keep her thrifty. A good mixture is whole oats and shelled corn or barley. This should be fed at the rate of about one pound for each ewe daily.

If you have good silage that is free from mold, feed it to the ewe at the rate of two to four pounds each day. When you feed silage, the ewe will need less hay. If you can't get alfalfa or clover and must use wild or mixed hay, follow this recommended grain mixture:

- 50 percent corn or barley
- 25 percent oats
- 15 percent bran
- 10 percent oil meal

It isn't necessary to feed grain or hay to the ewe when she has been turned on good pasture.

Caring for Your Lamb

Age one to two weeks

Your lamb will begin to eat solid food at 10 to 15 days, so you should pro-

vide a lamb creep for him when he is ready. This creep is a very simple arrangement that you can make yourself by partitioning a pen off with upright slats. Allow enough room for the lamb but not enough for the ewe to go through. In this way you can give the lamb a special ration.

After you have finished the creep, place a flat-bottomed trough nine inches off the floor inside the pen so the lamb can get to the grain at all times. Here is an excellent grain mixture that you can feed your lamb: one-third ground or rolled oats, one-third cracked corn or barley, and one-third bran. In addition to this grain mixture you should provide him with a bright, leafy legume hay.

Each day you should take away any grain that the lamb leaves and feed it to the old sheep. Lambs like clean, fresh grain.

Now when the lamb is very young you have two special jobs to do that are going to be important to his appearance and worth. These are docking and castrating. Docking is necessary on all lambs, but you castrate only the rams which you intend to market.

Docking adds to the appearance of the lamb, and it also prevents the collection of filth around the tail. In that way it aids the lamb's health. Docking should be done when the lamb is four or five days old.

Docking and castrating can be done at the same time, but it is a much better idea to dock first and castrate when the lamb is two weeks old. Pick warm sunny forenoons to perform each of these operations. This way you can watch the lambs during the day to see that their wounds are not bleeding too much. Clean the shed thoroughly and be sure that it is well bedded before you perform either operation.

This is the way to dock:

First take the skin at the base of the tail and press it back toward the body. You do this so that when the tail is removed the loose skin will partly cover the wound and help along healing. Then using a sharp knife, cut off the tail about one inch from the body. If the wound bleeds too much, sear it a little with a hot iron.

A few days after the lambs are docked, single out the rams you want castrated. Here is the method you should follow for castrating: making sure that your hands and knife are disinfected, take hold of the lamb the same as for docking. Take the end of the scrotum in your left hand and pull it away from the testicles. Then cut off the lower third of the scrotum, being careful not to cut into the testicles but leaving them partly exposed.

With your left hand grasp the base of the scrotum and push it back over the testicles and in on the lamb's belly. You will find that the testicles will stick out and can be removed by a straight pull with your right hand, getting as much cord as possible.

After the job is done use good soapy water or some other disinfectant to clean the wound. Another precaution you should take in warm weather is to apply pine tar **around** (but never **on**) the cut surface to keep flies away.

Age Two to Four Weeks

This period is much the same as the first for your lambs. You can continue the same practices as you began at first. The same ration should be fed—and plenty of it, for the cheapest gains



Proper method of docking.

can be made in the first few weeks. Keep on giving the ewe plenty of feed, too, so that she will continue to supply plenty of milk for the lamb.

Age Six to Eight Weeks

When the lamb is six weeks old, he won't need his grain ground for him any longer. When he reaches two months of age, you can change the grain ration over to the same as is fed the ewe. This ration may be self-fed:

- 50 percent corn or barley
- 25 percent oats
- 15 percent bran
- 10 percent oil meal



Proper method of castrating.

When the lambs go out on pasture, the feed picture changes again. But it is wise for you to keep on feeding your lamb some grain even when he is on pasture with his dam. Lambs usually get too much pasture and too little grain, so they do not fatten as they should.

The best way to feed the grain is to provide a lamb creep at some convenient place in the pasture. If you don't have a creep, feed some grain to the lamb before he goes to pasture in the morning and again when he comes back at night.

Age Two Months and On

When the lamb is four or five months old, he should be weaned by taking him away from the ewe so they can't hear one another. At this point you should watch the ewe carefully for udder trouble and milk her a few times if necessary.

After weaning you should place the lamb on good fresh pasture such as new fields of rape, bluegrass, or sweet-clover. Old pastures may be full of parasites. We'll talk a little more about these parasites in a paragraph in the next column.

While the lamb is on this pasture, continue to feed large amounts of the same grain ration as before. When the lamb is this age and on pasture, you should be feeding him grain twice a day, giving him an amount that he will clean up easily.

Feeding during this period is very important for success in your lamb raising project. But don't forget that good care of the lamb is also necessary for success. Included in the care of the lambs are the trimming of hoofs and the control of parasites.

- Trim the lamb's feet occasionally during the summer so that he can stand up well on his legs. If he can't stand up straight he is likely to have weak pasterns. Use a sharp pocketknife and trim down the walls of each hoof so that the wearing surface is level from the toe to heel.

- Control ticks in order to protect the health of the sheep. After shearing, both the ewe and lamb should be dipped in a regular sheep dip that you can get from most drug stores. Be sure that the water you mix with the chemicals is warm, for that way the chemicals will dissolve easily and the sheep won't get chilled. Dip early in the morning on a warm, bright day so that the sheep will have a chance to dry off and won't get colds or pneumonia. You can use this substitute for dipping: a 2½ percent solution of DDT sprayed on the sheep with a coarse-nozzled liquid sprayer.

Some other points to remember in feeding and caring for your lamb are these:

1. Always provide shade in summer while the lambs are on pasture.
2. Fresh water should always be available.
3. It is well to feed a mixture of: seven parts trace mineralized salt, two parts dicalcium phosphate, and one part phenothiazine.
4. If you have reason to believe your lamb is infected with worms, it is suggested you treat him with one-half ounce of phenothiazine and one-half gram of lead arsenate. These materials are available ready mixed in this proportion.
5. Provide fresh pasture even though you may have to change the lambs from one field to another quite often.

Finishing the Lamb

The right kind of feed is the most important item as the time approaches for the show.

Four to six weeks before showing, change to a finishing ration of 90 percent corn and 10 percent oil meal. A thrifty lamb should eat nearly two pounds of the grain mixture a day and about 1½ pounds of good roughage during the period.

For finishing, the lamb may be fed indoors, but be sure to make the change gradually or he may get sick. He is

used to being out frisking in the fresh air and naturally he doesn't like it when he suddenly finds himself in a dark shed. One way you can help to make the change easy for him is to give him plenty of exercise. Exercise will firm up the flesh and keep him healthy.

At the same time you should make the feed more attractive by serving only the brightest, leafiest alfalfa or second-cutting clover. Lambs also like cabbage, turnips, and other roots. This, along with a well-balanced grain ration, will bring your lamb along nicely.

Keep hay before the lamb at all times, and feed grain and cabbage or roots twice daily—allowing him an amount that he will clean up in a short time. Cut down on the hay if the lamb is not eating close to two pounds of grain each day.

For a good finish, depend on grain. Pasture and roughage won't put on the finish needed in a show lamb.

Preparing for the Show

Blocking and trimming. During the finishing period will come another important job for you. It is the last of your really big jobs. Keep the fleece clean and free from foreign material, especially after you start blocking. A blanket can be made from a burlap bag or canvas with a strap around the neck and each leg to hold it in place. It will be up to you to give your lamb the best possible appearance.

The best way to do this is to block out the lamb by evening up the ends of the wool fibers to give the fleece a smooth appearance. You should do this two or three times during the finishing period, and then a day or two before the show you should do a really careful job.

The materials you use for trimming are a wool card, a heavy brush, a curry comb, and hand shears. And here is the way you go about it:

First rough up the wool over the back from the neck to the dock, then

along the sides, and then down over the leg of mutton. You use a brush for this in order to break up the tips of wool fibers and remove surface dirt. Then use a wool card.

The next step is the blocking, and you will find that wetting the wool a little will help. Keep the shears on a level plane and at right angles to the line of the back while you are cutting. Try not to hack or jump around in your cutting or you won't end up with a nice-appearing lamb.

When the fleece on the back has been trimmed, go to the sides and card them before trimming. Hold the shears straight up and down from the ground for trimming the sides. Your position changes, too. Stand behind the lamb and begin at the right shoulder, trimming that one side to a straight flat appearance.

Then move to the front of the lamb to trim the left side, beginning at the rear and working forward. You should then round out the top by trimming away the corner where the top and side come together.

In trimming the legs, first comb out the wool carefully and clip away only enough wool to make the legs appear smooth. If there is manure around the rear end, wash it off, but don't trim off the dung locks, wash them out.

Now your job is done except for the finishing touches. Trim the dock close and then square up the hindquarters. Trim the brisket so as to give the lamb a full, broad appearance, and trim the head and neck just enough to smooth them up.

Training. Give your lamb regular training during the finishing period so he will learn to obey.

Stand or kneel at the lamb's left side with your left hand under the jaw and your right hand just back of the head. Then see that all four of the lamb's feet are placed squarely under the body.

Don't use a halter, leather bands, or straps, for you cannot use anything but your hands in the show ring.



At the Show

Remember to take your wool card, brush, sponge, and shears to the show. Other points to remember are these:

1. At this time you turn in the record and story of how you raised your lamb.

2. Be on time for the judging.

3. Have your lamb ready to bring out promptly when you are asked to do so.

4. Show your lamb the best way you know till the awards are made

5. Be prepared to answer these questions for the judge:

- "Is your lamb a grade or purebred?"
- "When was your lamb born?"

It is at the show that your efforts all through the summer are shown. If you have done your best to feed and care for your lamb, you can be proud of him at show time whether you win a prize or not. If you don't win a prize, compare notes with the winners to learn what they did.

Your experience will help you to raise an even better lamb next year. Remember that it isn't the show and the prizes that really count. The important thing is that you have learned more about good farming practices.

One way to help you remember what you did in raising your lamb is in filling out the 4-H project record. You should keep a careful record of your work—including such things as feeding, care, and cost—and then write a story on "How I Raised My Lamb."



Near-ideal conformation and finish—straight top line and legs placed squarely under the body.

Looking Forward

Once you have learned how to select, raise, and fit an individual lamb your next aim should be to learn good breeding, good feeding, and good management of a **flock** of sheep. You can get this experience in the Trio project (pen of three lambs), the Ten Ewe project, and the Western Lamb feeding project.

The Ewe Lamb project provides a good foundation for one of these advanced sheep projects, because you can keep all the lambs from your first ewe and then make up your own flock.

So you can see that the 4-H Sheep projects are set up in a way to help you learn. Start with the Fat Lamb or Ewe Lamb project and then you can enroll in the Trio—or in the Western Lamb feeding project in certain parts of the state. When you have 10 or more ewes, enroll in the Ten Ewe project. By following this procedure you will get full benefit of 4-H Sheep Club work.

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