

Fitting and Showing Sheep

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Much experience and satisfaction can be gained from doing an effective job of fitting and showing your lamb. A good exhibitor puts that extra effort and pride of animal into the project.

Equipment

There is certain equipment needed to fit your lamb. The following list contains the basic equipment:

- Large and small wool cards
- Mild detergent
- Hand shears
- Wash brush
- Rope halter
- Feed pan and water pail
- Blanket

A more extensive list could include:

- Blocking stand
- Electric sheep shears
- Electric blower-dryer
- Foot trimming pliers

These last items will aid in your fitting but may be too expensive for the first year project.

Foot trimming

The lamb's feet should be trimmed about two weeks before the show. This will help the lamb stand more correctly.

To trim the lamb's feet, place the lamb on its rump, hold between your knees with the lamb's head up.

Trim the excessive overgrown hoof area. If needed, trim the tip of each toe. Care should be taken to avoid cutting too deeply or lameness can result. If the cut becomes infected, a disinfectant coating such as Copper-tox should be applied.

Shearing

Most market and ewe lambs are shown in short fleece, which makes the lamb easier to keep clean and cooler during the summer. Shearing the lambs 2 months before the show should allow a growth of $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of wool.

Start shearing your lamb by placing it on its rump. Shear out the breast area first, then shear the neck and head. Use long smooth clipping strokes to obtain a smooth, uniform clipping job.

Apply pressure in front of the rear leg in the flank region to prevent the lamb from kicking and allow clipping of the leg and rump area.

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With long smooth clipping motions, continue to clip from rear to front and complete clipping the entire body.

Washing

Clean the excessive dirt, straw, and manure from the lamb with a stiff brush or curry comb.

By wetting the lamb down with lukewarm water, much of the dirt will loosen. Thoroughly rub a mild detergent into the fleece of the lamb.

Hold the ears closed while washing the head and avoid getting soap or water in the eyes.

Hold the hose at an angle and rinse the soap from the lamb. This procedure will help to keep the ends of the wool from being forced in toward the body. Thoroughly rinse all the soap out of the fleece and ring out the water by squeezing and brushing your hands over the lamb's fleece.

Place your lamb in a clean, dry, and warm place to dry. A blower-dryer can be used to speed up drying.

Blocking

Most white faced wool breeds, such as Columbias and Corriedales, are shown unshorn. About 40 percent of the evaluation is placed on wool quality. Therefore, blocking the wool becomes part of the lamb's grooming before the show.

Wool cards, of various sizes, are basic tools in blocking lambs.

A large size card is used to pull out the ends of the lamb's wool. This should be done over the entire lamb. The card is placed on the wool and is turned up slightly so the teeth will pull out the loose ends. Pull firmly and make sure the ends are pulled out before you begin to use the hand shears.

The small card is used around the head and legs. Carding will make the lamb's legs appear heavier boned.

Hold the trimming shears at a 45 degree angle to the lamb's back. The bottom blade should be held steady and the top blade used for cutting. Clip a small area at a time. Slight wetting of the wool and frequent carding will even out the wool length. Continue clipping a small amount at a time until the wool is blended smoothly.

Clip the lamb from the rear to the front on the right side and from the bottom up. If you are left handed, clip from the rear to the front on the left side.

The rump should be trimmed to make the leg look as wide and muscular as possible. Trim the twist area to emphasize trimness and muscle expression. From the front, block the breast and front end to show the chest width and trimness.

A well blocked lamb should have a very smooth and uniform appearance. The lamb's good points are emphasized and the bad points lessened.

Your lamb should be covered with a blanket, either home-made or purchased, to help keep the fleece clean, firm, and neat.



Figure 1. Set lambs up properly as well as watching the judge for instructions.

Showing

Before showing, the last touches must be made. Make sure the lamb is clean. The lamb's ears and face should be cleaned with a small cloth. Black faced lambs can be improved by applying a light coat of a mixture of $\frac{2}{3}$ mineral oil and $\frac{1}{3}$ rubbing alcohol to the dark points of the ear, nose, and legs.

Lambs can be shown with a rope halter. This is suggested for the younger exhibitors or those with large unruly lambs. The halter should be an appropriate size with a short lead strap. The lamb should be properly trained at home to present it in its best condition in the show ring.

Before the show begins, familiarize yourself with the show schedule. A good exhibitor always enters the show ring on time. You should also know the basic facts about your lamb, such as birthdate, weight, breeding information, and your feeding management program.

Enter the show ring when your class is called. Line up your lamb, following the directions of the show management. Set your lamb squarely on its feet (figure 1). Pick up the front end of the lamb to set the front feet correctly. Set the hind legs by picking them up and setting them down squarely. Do not stretch your lamb or place the legs excessively wide.

When you are asked to move your lamb, move calmly but quickly to the directed place. Lead the lamb by the halter lead strap or under the chin of the lamb. With the other hand apply pressure to the dock (tail) area. Always remain on the left side of the lamb and keep the lamb between you and the judge (figure 2).



Figure 2. Walk on the left side of your lamb at all times, holding it by the chin or the halter strap. Follow judge's directions.

Set the lamb up quickly when you arrive at the directed place in the show ring. Your attention has to be divided between the lamb and the judge. Always follow the judge's instructions. You may be asked to move or give a side view of your lamb.

When the judge approaches your lamb for handling, stand in front of the lamb and hold tightly under its chin with both hands (figure 3). This will give you better control and prevent the lamb from jumping away. Apply a slight backward pressure on the lamb's chin. This will make the lamb tighten its muscles and handle more firmly.



Figure 3. Stand in front of your lamb while judge handles. Hold lamb's head with both hands and apply a slight backward pressure to make the lamb firmer handling.

Herdsmanship

Showmanship should be practiced in the barn as well as in the show ring. Good feeding and cleaning practices should be continued throughout and after the show.

Try to learn as much as possible from the other exhibitors. You will probably not do a perfect job your first year. Learn from your mistakes and try harder next time. Be a good sport, a humble winner, and a thoughtful loser.

C. J. Christians, professor, Department of Animal Science and extension animal husbandman, University of Minnesota.

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4-H SHEEP SHOWMANSHIP SCORE CARD*

(100 points possible)

A. APPEARANCE OF LAMB

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1. Cleanliness | Perfect Score
40 points |
| a. Wool clean and free of foreign matter. | 15 |
| b. Head, flanks, feet, and legs clean. | |
| 2. Trimming | 25 |
| a. Desirable that fleece of market lambs be trimmed to a length of $\frac{3}{8}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. However, the final decision on length of fleece is left to the individual show. | |
| b. Fleece of breeding ewes trimmed to a length of $\frac{3}{8}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch or, in the case of a wool breed, a length which is appropriate for the standard of their breed. | |
| c. Back, sides, and legs of breeding sheep trimmed to emphasize merits of individual. | |
| d. Feet trimmed so that lamb walks and stands naturally and correctly. | |

B. SHOWING LAMB

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|--|----------------------------|
| 1. Posing and Changing Positions | Perfect Score
40 points |
| a. Lamb kept well posed at all times but exhibitor not engaged in undue fussing or maneuvering. | 30 |
| b. Lamb shows evidence of training as indicated by responsiveness to handling. | |
| c. Lamb shown from front when judge is viewing it from rear or left side; otherwise lamb shown from left side only. | |
| d. Exhibitor shows while standing or in a half-kneeling (one knee on ground) position except when moving lamb to a new position. | |
| e. Lamb led from left side with left hand under jaw and right hand at the dock. | |
| f. Reasonable distance from next animal maintained at all times. | |
| g. Proper to let lamb relax but not out of position when judge is at other end of arena. | |
| h. Lamb braced by grasping under chin with both hands, pulling downward and applying | |

backward pressure to cause lamb to hold its back rigid but straight while being handled.

- | | |
|--|----|
| i. Halter can be used for control. | |
| 2. Cooperation With Judge | 10 |
| a. Awareness of position of judge maintained but not made obvious. | |
| b. Body not permitted to obstruct view of judge. | |
| c. Lamb maneuvered into position for benefit of judge's inspection before but not during inspection. | |

APPEARANCE AND MERITS OF EXHIBITOR

Perfect Score
20 points

- | | |
|---|----|
| 1. Appearance | 10 |
| a. Exhibitor well groomed and clothes clean and neat. | |
| b. Suggested that no headgear be worn in class. However, the final decision on headgear is left to the individual show. | |
| c. Any color except white is appropriate for trousers. Shorts are not considered appropriate. Extremes in colors and fit not appropriate. | |
| d. White shirt (or blouse) with the official 4-H chevron, a 4-H T-shirt or official shirt (or blouse) provided by show management are considered appropriate. However, the final decision on dress code is left to the individual show. | |
| 2. Merits | 10 |
| a. Brings lamb into ring promptly. | |
| b. Responsive to judge's and ringmaster's requests. | |
| c. Works quickly but not abruptly. | |
| d. Recognizes quickly and corrects faults of lamb. | |
| e. Not distracted by persons and things outside ring. | |
| f. Shows animal, not self. | |
| g. Does not leave ring until released by ring official. | |
| h. Displays a courteous and sportsmanlike attitude at show. | |
| i. Prepared to give prompt answers to questions related to the 4-H sheep project. | |

*Prepared in collaboration with Dave Williams, University of Nebraska, and Tom Wickersham, Iowa State University.