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The Market Lamb Guide to Success



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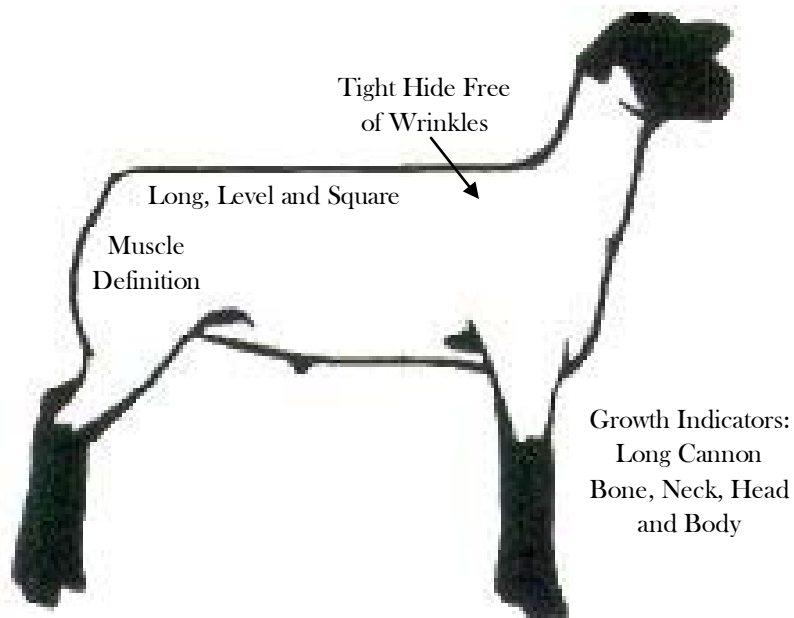
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Considerations for Selecting a Lamb

The most important thing to consider when selecting a market lamb is the date of your county fair. The average lamb will be finished between 5 and 7 months of age. A lamb that is to be shown in the summer months will generally be born between December and February and purchased after weaning in the spring.

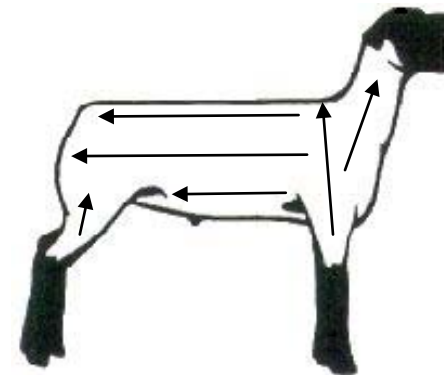
Other considerations include confirmation. When considering confirmation it is important to think about muscle, structural correctness, style and balance and growth potential. A good market lamb prospect should have definition of muscle, travel and stand square on both front and back legs, have a clean front, smooth shoulder, level top, level rump, trim middle, straight legs and have the ability to grow rapidly. Below is a figure identifying some important points to look for when selecting a market lamb.



Shearing

It is important to keep your market lamb shorn during the summer months. This will help keep them cool and comfortable. Shearing for the show should be done 7 to 10 days before the show.

Wash your lamb before shearing. This will help to get a closer cut and keep your clippers working properly. As you shear keep the skin stretched to avoid wrinkles. Begin shearing the body by making two upward shearing strokes from the base of the foreleg over the top of the shoulders. The neck should be shorn lengthwise to emphasize the length and trimness of the lamb. The body should be shorn by starting at the shoulder and shearing toward the rump of the lamb. Shear the back legs using upward shearing strokes. The figure below indicates the direction you should be shearing your market lamb.



Show Day Preparation

Start your show day preparation by washing your market lamb and letting them dry completely. For lambs that have leg wool you will want to card it out and blend the wool into the rest of the body. Finally, clean your lamb's ears and have fun.

Preparing a Market Lamb for Show

Preparing at Home

It is important to work with your animal at home to train them for the show day. You will want to halter break your lamb as soon as possible. Teach your lamb to brace, set its legs and walk at your request. Practice showing your lamb every day to help ensure that your lamb will handle properly in the show ring.

Exercise

Exercise is essential for a successful market lamb project. Exercise will help condition and tone your market lamb for the show. An exercise program should start two to three months before the show and should consist of short (300-400 Yards) vigorous spurts of exercise. Start slow and gradually work up to a more intense exercise schedule. An exercise track and a trained dog is considered the best method for exercising, but other methods such as the using a bicycle or running may also be effective. Walking your lamb daily will help as well. You can also use jumps as an exercise tool.

Be sure that you do not over heat your lamb. Try to exercise in the cooler part of the day. Also pay attention to the weight and fat deposition of your lamb. If your lamb is not going to meet the minimum weight requirements an exercise program might not be beneficial. You also do not want to lose fat by over exercising.



Meat Quality Assurance

A quality assurance program is a program designed to help livestock producers raise their animals in a way that will provide a safe and wholesome product for the consumer.

As a 4-H livestock producer it is your responsibility to produce a safe food product while caring for your animals in an ethical manner. Proper handling and management of your livestock project is essential to the quality of the final product. Be consistent in your feeding regimen and handle animals in a quiet, gentle manner. Keep accurate and complete records and maintain a healthy animal. When treatment or injections are necessary for animal health read the label, administer properly, adhere to withdrawal times, give injects in the neck and keep accurate records. Be sure to consult your veterinarian for vaccination and treatment options.

A high-quality, safe, wholesome food product is the goal of every livestock producer. Make sure you are doing your part by raising your 4-H market project in a safe and ethical manner. Below are some examples of humane and inhumane practices.

Humane Practices

- Feed a balanced ration
- Provide plenty of clean water
- Follow a planned health and vaccination program
- Keep animals in a warm dry place that is adequately ventilated and well bedded
- Start training animals at a young age

Inhumane Practices

- Lack of animal grooming
- Failure to feed and water animals regularly
- Failure to keep pen and stalls clean and dry
- Kicking, kneeling, beating, jerking, or slapping an animal in the ring
- Improper medicating of animals

How to Feed a Market Lamb

Proper feeding of your market lamb is essential for a successful project. Hand feeding or feeding a limited amount of feed multiple times throughout the day is recommended for lambs. This will help prevent overeating and allow you to monitor the growth of your lamb. You will need to feed your lamb both roughages (hay) and concentrates (grains).

Feeding Roughages

In order for your lamb's digestive system to function properly you will need to provide some form of roughages. Grass and alfalfa hay are the most common roughages to feed a market lamb. Feed your lamb a minimum of 1 lb of hay per day to ensure proper digestion.

Feeding Concentrates

Once you have your lamb, it is important to allow them to adjust to their new surroundings. During these first few days it is a good idea to feed your lamb strictly grass or alfalfa hay, especially if they have not previously been fed concentrates.

Starting Your Lamb on Concentrates

Start feeding your lamb concentrates in small portions. The portions should be approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ lb per day. Your lamb should consume the grain in 15-20 minutes. After 20 minutes remove any excess grain and reduce the amount of grain fed the next feeding by the amount that was not consumed. You want your lamb to eat all of the grain that is provided. Gradually increase the amount of grain being fed until you have reached 2 lbs per day. This should be accomplished over a two week period.

Growing vs. Finishing Rations

A lamb should be fed a growing ration with 16-18% protein until they reach approximately 70 to 85 lbs. At this time the lamb does not require as much protein and can be fed a finishing ration with 12-14% protein.

When switching from a growing to a finishing ration it is important to do it gradually. Start by adding a small portion of finishing ration to the growing ration being fed. Every few days add more finishing ration and feed less growing ration.

Determining How Much to Feed

Take the time to evaluate how much your lamb will need to gain from the time of purchase until your show date to be sure you start feeding grain at the most appropriate time and amount. As an example you purchase a 50 lb lamb, your lamb must weigh a minimum of 110 lbs for the show and you have 80 days until your show. Your lamb needs to gain 60 lbs or $\frac{3}{4}$ lb per day.

$$110 \text{ lbs} - 50 \text{ lbs} = 60 \text{ lbs}$$

$$60 \text{ lbs} / 80 \text{ Days} = 0.75 \text{ lbs/day}$$

Lambs typically need to eat 2 to 5 lbs of grain for every $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 pound of gain. Your lamb will need to eat between 2 and 5 lbs of grain to ensure a gain of $\frac{3}{4}$ lb per day.

Water and Minerals

Always provide plenty of clean water and have free choice loose salt, and loose trace minerals available at all times. Feed your lamb on a regular schedule and weigh your lambs fed at least once a week so that you know how much your lamb is eating.