



Fitting & Showing Your Sheep

Message from 4-H Alberta's Sheep Advisory Committee
- Please check the Show Rules for the show you are preparing for. Some of the information from this resource may not be applicable (ie wool length).



Fitting & Showing Your Sheep

Setting The Stage

Training your lamb is an important part of the preparation for showing. Lambs are easily trained if they are treated properly during the project.

You must work with your lamb until it is gentle before you can start training it. Start visiting your lamb two to three times a day for a week. Sit and watch it as it moves about. During the second week, pet the lamb while it eats. During the third week, pat the lamb now and then and handle it as you would in a judging class. By the end of a month the lamb should be ready to train.

Sheep Tricks-As Easy as 1,2,3

Step 1 - Moving Your Lamb

To move the lamb, stand on its left side, grasp it under its chin with your left hand and put your right hand on its dock. Guide the lamb with your left hand and move it by pressing on its dock with your right hand. Never work your lamb for long periods of time or it will become restless and stubborn.

Step 2 - Setting Your Lamb Up

In the showing, the lamb should stand quietly with the front and hind legs wide apart. The head should be held up. Always work on the side of the lamb opposite to the judge. In general, you will be working on the left side (from the rear of the lamb) of your lamb. Occasionally you will have to move your lamb on the right side. Set the lamb by moving its feet into proper position with your hands. Practice this often for short periods of time.

Step 3 - Bracing a Lamb

Bracing is a term that means having the lamb hold its back rigid when someone presses on it. Stand in front of your lamb and cup its chin in your hands. Pull downward with your hands and apply enough backward pressure to cause the lamb to arch or bend its back. Do not choke the lamb or grasp so hard that you hurt the animal.

First Impressions Count

You may not be able to judge a book by its cover but in the showing general appearance is the first thing a livestock judge notices. The first impression is important.

Grooming Your Lamb

Short Wool Breeds

Shearing	Shearing is done six to eight weeks before show time. This will eliminate most of the work of cutting wool to proper length by trimming.
Washing	Wash your lamb one week before a show. This makes trimming easier.
Trimming	About three hours work is required to trim market lamb if it was shorn early in the project.

Wool Breeds

Shearing	Wool breeds are not shorn, they are shown in full fleece.
Washing	Long wool breed lambs should not be washed because oils in the fleece are a natural form of protection.
Trimming	Full fleeced lamb should be dampened, and chaff picked out and locks separated. Part wool down the center of the back. Trim dock, chest and wool tips.

Trimming the Feet

Trim the feet of your lamb as needed during the feeding period so they will not require excessive trimming before the show. Trimming your lamb's feet just before a show may cause him to walk improperly or go lame because there won't be enough time for the feet to fully heal.

In trimming the feet, set the lamb on its rump with all four feet off the ground. Tilt it back and to the side slightly. Hold it in position by pressing your knees firmly into its side. The hooves can be trimmed by using pruning shears or a hoof trimmer. Each hoof should be carefully trimmed in the following manner:

1. Clean manure and dirt from the bottom of the foot and between the toes.
2. Slowly and carefully remove the outer wall of the hoof until it is level with the sole or the bottom of foot.
3. Do not trim to the point that the hoof bleeds.
4. Trim the dewclaws if necessary.

If you are not sure about what you are doing, ask an adult for assistance or for a demonstration of the proper technique.

NOTE: It is a good idea to trim the hind feet first; as it is less dangerous to get kicked by an untrimmed foot (they are not as sharp).

Washing Your Lamb

Your lamb can be washed in a tub of warm soapy water or by placing it on the trimming stand. Wash using either a shampoo or mild soap and a stiff brush, and rinse well using a hose. Hold the end of the hose next to the skin and move in a circular scrubbing motion. Pay special attention to the belly, under the legs and the crotch. Use livestock shampoo or clear mild dishsoap.

Remove excess moisture from the fleece with your hand or with a flat surface such as the back of a wool card. Dry the fleece with a terry cloth towel or carefully with your hair dryer or beef blower. Keep the hair dryer moving — it will BURN the skin if held too long in one spot.

Keep the lamb in a clean, well bedded pen filled with plenty of clean, dry straw until show time. Cover the lamb with a blanket to keep the straw out of the fleece.

Blanketing

Blanketing your lamb helps to distribute the natural oil throughout the fleece and helps to keep your sheep clean. Before blanketing your lamb, use a curry comb or brush to remove surface dirt. A blanket can be made from a clean burlap sack or pillow case. Open a sack down one side almost to the corner, leaving 15-25 cm fastened together at the corner to fit over the sheep's brisket; then open just enough of the end for the sheep's head and neck. Put the sheep's head through the hole in the bottom of the sack. A twine loop or cotton string for the rear legs will hold the blanket in place.

Carding

The card is used for straightening the wool fibers so they can be trimmed evenly. Hook your thumb around the handle of the card with your fingers placed solidly along the back of the card.

Catch the top of the fleece with the hooks on the card and pull out. Do not catch too deep as this makes for hard work and is painful for the sheep. Do not catch too shallow or you will not do a good carding job.

Practice until you can card with a rolling motion of your hand and wrist. Set the heel of the card in the fleece first; then push the top side of the card into the fleece and bring the heel up and out of the fleece at the same time. Go slowly at first until you get the feel of it.

When the card fills with wool, it should not be cleaned by pulling one card over the other. Use a small rake which you can make by putting a ninety degree bend in the prongs of a discarded dinner fork.

How to use the wool card in fitting your lamb: (1) and (2) pat card into fleece; (3) roll card out of fleece. Never try to rake the card through the fleece.

The purpose of trimming a lamb is to remove fleece over the entire body to a desired length of about 0.75 to 1 cm. The last trimming should be done carefully so the fleece is smooth and ready for show. You will only need to dampen, card and trim off the rough edges the day of the fair.

The fitting or grooming should be done in a manner which displays the natural contour of the body when viewed from the rear. The wool is rounded over the rump to the dock and down each side to blend with the leg. Trim outward on the leg to blend with the side and over the rump. Flatness and squareness is associated with overly fat lambs, so avoid this shape.

Sufficient wool should be trimmed off the leg to make it handle easily and look good. The thigh region should be the widest on a structurally correct, well muscled lamb. Trim the sides smooth and blend the top and sides while following the natural contour of the forelegs.

Carefully cut the wool from around the eyes and blend with the jaw and neck. Have an adult help you with this step if you are uncertain about what to do. Roll and blend the neck and chest. Dip the wool card in water and pat the fleece all over. This will smooth the surface and pack the wool.

Follow this procedure when you trim your lamb:

1. Keep the fleece damp while working with it until you fine trim it. It is easier if lamb is soaked and rubbed until damp. Don't trim wool that is very wet.
2. Use a curry comb or wool rake to drag the fleece. This breaks the crimp and makes for a smoother look. Card the wool after dragging.
3. Starting on the top, trim off the tips of all carded wool using the shears in such a manner that a uniform, even cut is made.
4. Place the shears flat on the surface to be trimmed and tilt slightly up.
5. Move the shears forward so the bottom blade glides slowly and smoothly. Do not move your thumb when trimming.
6. As the bottom blades move forward, clip the fleece by repeatedly pulling the top blade back to the bottom blade and releasing it.
7. As you trim, stop often and dip the shears in water to clean them. Always keep the blades damp when trimming.

What Equipment Do You Need?

A trimming stand is useful but not absolutely necessary. You can restrain the lamb in a halter. The lamb's head should be held at the most desirable height or position for showing when you are doing the trimming.

A small tool box can be used as a tack box to keep your equipment in. This keeps all tools in one place and your display area will look tidier at show day.

Items For Your Tack Box

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| 1. Bucket | 6. Brush |
| 2. Hoof trimmers | 7. Trimming shears and whetstone |
| 3. Wool card | 8. Blanket |
| 4. Curry comb or wool rake | 9. Sheep halter |
| 5. Rags and scraps of cloth used to clean shears or dry fleece | |

Showmanship Etiquette

1. Be sure you and your clothes are **neat and clean**. Check the show guidelines or standards for specific clothing requirements. Do not chew gum.
2. Be **alert, polite and courteous** to the judge and other show people. Always be on time for a show.
3. You should appear keen but relaxed regardless of where you are placed, accepting the judge's decision in a **sportsmanlike manner**. Remember that the class is not over until the class exits the ring. Keep showing until you are out of the ring.
4. Keep your animal **under control at all times** and make frequent glances at the judge to watch for his/her directions.
5. **Be prepared to lead** any animal that the judge designates.
6. Be prepared to **answer questions** that would normally be asked by a judge about a lamb such as birth date, breed line, diet.
7. **Avoid grandstanding** or showing off. Don't be sidetracked by members of the audience.
8. **Always shake hands** with the champion and the reserve champion. Sportsmanship is a big part of the show!

SHOWMANSHIP SCORECARD

A.	FITTING	20 points
1.	Condition	
2.	Cleanliness	
3.	Trimming and/or grooming	
4.	Condition of hooves	
B.	TRAINING AND SHOWING ANIMAL	40 points
1.	Evidence of previous training	
2.	Handling of project animal	
3.	Posing the project animal	
4.	Project animal's response to exhibitor's movements	
5.	Indication of good knowledge of animal's faults and habits	
C.	RING MANNERS AND APPEARANCE OF SHOWMAN	40 points
1.	Clothes neat, clean and suitable to occasion	
2.	Full attention given to the job at hand	
3.	Is on time, alert and aware of the judge, responds to judge's request	
4.	Courteous, and polite to other exhibitors and judge	
5.	Knowledge of project animal's pedigree, care and management program	
TOTAL POINTS		100 points

Showing Technique

The art of exhibiting a sheep rests on the exhibitor's ability to keep his/her animal under perfect control. With this as a basis, control under different situations should be as follows:

1. Sheep being posed with the judge at its rear and viewing from a distance. You should be facing your sheep with a hand grasping each cheek. You should be standing, and sheep should be posed with feet moderately spread, but tucked under enough so the back does not sag. Sheep should be on the level or the front feet on slightly rising ground. You may bend your knees to brace yourself against a sudden movement of the sheep, but may not kneel on one or both knees. Do not place your hands at any other place on the sheep, such as over the shoulders or neck or back of the head.
2. Sheep being posed but legs out of position. Front feet may be best placed and spread by quick lift and drop while you maintain the same grasp as in (1) above. Lift strongly enough to clear the ground with both feet. Front feet can also be positioned by lifting by hand. Hind feet may be placed in either of two ways.
 - a) By pushing or pulling toward or away from the wrongly positioned foot, using the same cheek grasp.

- b) By lifting the off-positioned foot by hand. Use the hand opposite to the particular hind foot to move the foot i.e. right hand moves left foot.
3. Judge approaches rear of sheep to handle it. The same grasp (at the cheeks) should be maintained. Bending your knees and a slight downward pull on the sheep's head will serve to control it. The show person should put their knee against the brisket to prevent bolting when the judge is handling the sheep.
 4. Judge views sheep from its right side. You should now stand at sheep's left side, near its head and slip your left hand under the sheep's jaw (well out toward the muzzle). The right hand should not touch the sheep except to rub the belly if needed. Sheep's head should be at normal level, not too high or too low.
 5. Judge moves to the front of sheen for view of head. Same position, standing at the left of the sheep's shoulder (as in (4)) should be maintained. Do not move too far to the rear and stretch at arm's length to hold the sheep's head. If sheep has changed its front leg position, the quick lift and drop by a cheek grasp can best correct it. If the lamb is very large it may be easier to lift each foot by hand. Do not worry too much about hind feet being slightly out of position.
 6. Judge now moves from head-on view to left side of sheep. You are correct in moving between the judge and your sheep to the opposite (right) side around the sheep's front end. (Never stretch around rear end or step over the sheep's back. In either case you can lose control of your animal.)
 7. Judge asks you, the exhibitor, to move sheep. You should be on the opposite side of sheep from judge. If you are on the sheep's left side, your left hand should be under the sheep's chin, well out towards muzzle, not choking him off in the throat. Your right hand, with fingers closed, should be on the sheep's dock. It would be considered very poor showmanship to grasp the wool with an open-fingered hand at any time. While it is fairly "showy" to move the sheep without touching its dock, this often results in loss of control and would not be considered good showmanship. The sheep should move at a fairly slow and even pace with its back level and head in normal position.
 8. Judge requires sheep to be turned and returned to line-up after walkout. You should turn the sheep so that its head remains close by your belt. Do not turn too sharply, or you will cause the sheep's hind legs to buckle. Simply change hands under the chin and reverse the sheep. You remain at its head so that for the return trip you will end up on the opposite side of the sheep from the judge. Do not make the turn so that its head faces away from your belt during the turn as it has a good chance to bolt away. Upon return to line-up, immediately place sheep in position. This is the easiest accomplished by the quick lift and drop of fore-quarters and hand-placing of hind feet.
 9. The Judge requires sheep to be turned over and set on rump for inspection of belly and hooves. Here are two methods that give you good control of the sheep and are fairly easy to do.

- (a) For a large exhibitor with a small sheep: While still holding the sheep's head, step over to straddle the sheep's back (facing toward the back of its head). Slip the right arm down under its breast (just back of the front legs), then do the same with the left arm and lift the front end tightly against your chest. Then stand up fully, make sure the sheep's hind feet clear the ground in the one lift attempt. Then let it slide down to a sitting position, tilted back on its dock.
 - (b) For a medium-sized exhibitor with a fairly large sheep: From a position close against the left side, twist the sheep's head to the right and back onto its neck while catching the right rear flank in the right hand. Twist and lift strongly at the same time to set the sheep on its rump.
10. Judge requires sheep to be returned to standing from rump position. Tip the sheep sharply forward with a loose hold on chin. A too slow and casual tipping may cause the sheep to simply lie down, in which case turning loose. the head, holding and pinching the dock is correct procedure to cause it to rise.
 11. Dusting off shavings and straw after sheep has risen should be done only as soon as judge has indicated he is moving onto the next sheep. Get the sheep posed first, then dust it off.
 12. In the line, or at any time the sheep is being viewed by the judge, calmness and control are far more important than showy gesturing and arms-length posing which allow the possibility of losing the sheep. Watch the position of the sheep more than you watch the judge. Keep the sheep "showing" at all times without excitement.
 13. If the sheep should bolt away, do not run after it and tackle it in a football fashion. Follow the sheep as quietly as possible to a corner or position where you can catch it quickly. As soon as the sheep is caught (under the chin), lift its head up, and then it cannot bolt so easily.