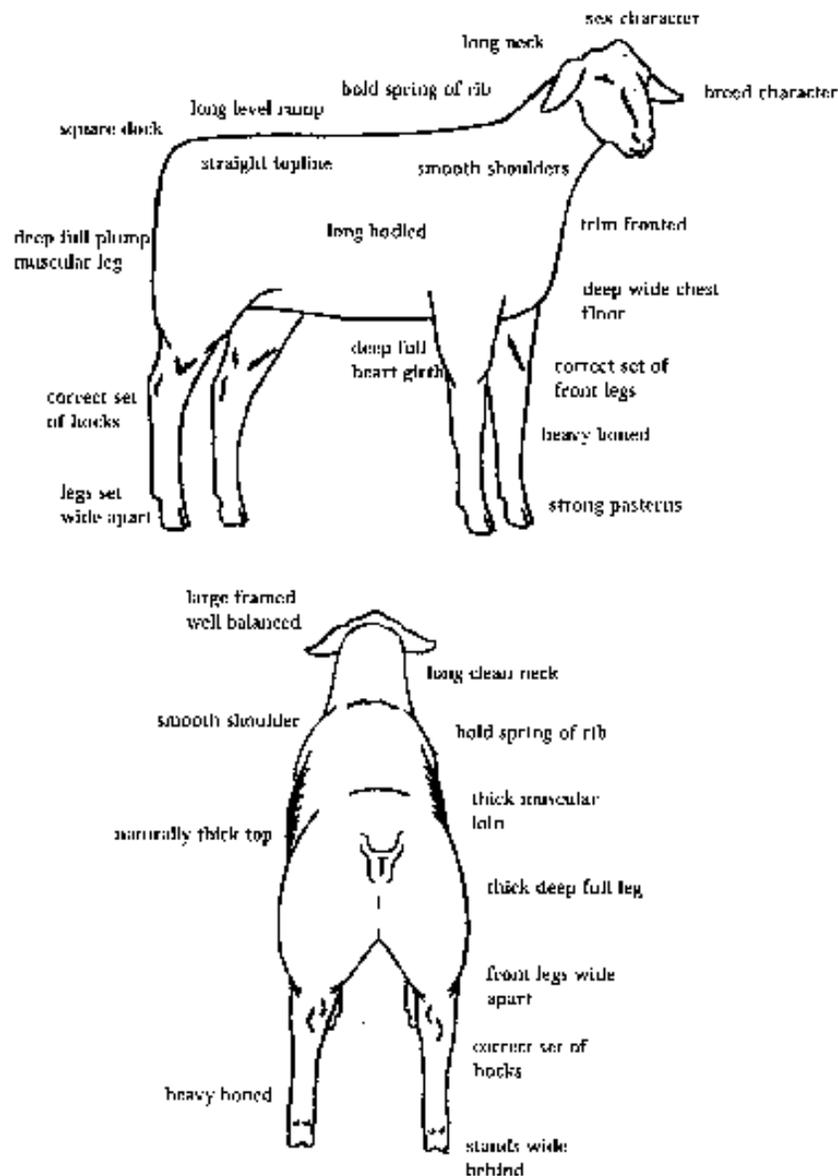


Judging Breeding Sheep

It is very difficult to visually assess an animal on one day of its life and determine its value to a flock owner. Selecting animals that follow breed type and have correct physical conformation is one step in a flock selection program.

Judge breeding sheep very similarly to the market lamb. Determine the amounts of muscle and finish, but place more emphasis on the structural correctness and the breed characteristics.

There is a difference between judging wool breeds and meat breeds. There are also dairy and hair breeds of sheep which are not being considered here. In the wool breeds, 25% of the score is based on the wool. In the meat breeds, only 10% is based on the wool.



Quality

Good quality is desirable whether you are selecting breeding or market sheep. Signs of quality in sheep are:

- clean cut well shaped head
- bone of ample size and clean joints
- minimum amount of smooth and evenly distributed finish
- bright, dense fleece
- pink skin
- symmetrically balanced body.

Size and Capacity

Larger animals are more desirable provided they are sound and have quality, balance and smoothness. There is an economic balance between body size and feed requirements that must be considered in profitable sheep production. Size varies with the breed. Be familiar with the characteristics of the breed you are judging.

Capacity is the size of the animal in relation to its ability to take in food and reproduce. To determine this, look at the depth through the heart and the width through the chest. A ewe must have the capacity to reproduce effectively.

Head and Neck

The neck should be trim, well set and of moderate length. The style of the head varies with the breed, but the head should always have a broad forehead, be open or free of wool down the nose and have plenty of width between the eyes and ears. The eyes should be bright, healthy and alert. The teeth should be fully functional.



Normal Mouth

- True, even bite
- Teeth meet evenly with edge of upper pad

Undershot Jaw

- "Parrot mouth"
- Upper jaw too long

Overshot Jaw

- Lower jaw too long, teeth extend beyond the pad

Shoulders

The shoulders should be joined neatly at the top with a minimum of flesh covering and blend smoothly with the neck. The chest should be wide and full to indicate capacity. The chest should be neat and trim and fit cleanly and tightly into the neck, shoulders and chest regions.

Condition

Condition is the amount of fat cover. In breeding classes, use the term condition rather than finish. When judging breeding animals, put more emphasis on muscling than on condition as you are not judging the animals as ready for market.

Breed and Sex Character

Sex character refers to those distinguishing features which differentiate males and females.

Rams should be masculine. They should be powerful with strong bones, and strong, bold heads and necks.

Ewes should be feminine. The bone of a ewe is smaller and more refined than that of a ram. The ewe must still be large and substantial enough to be a strong mother.

Each breed has specific breed characteristics. Again, know the specific characteristics of the breed you are judging.

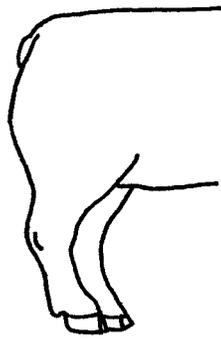
Balance

Balance is extremely important in livestock selection. Balance refers to the parts of the body in proportion to one another and how well those parts blend together as the animal moves. A well balanced animal moves freely, has a desirable style and general appearance where all parts fit together well.

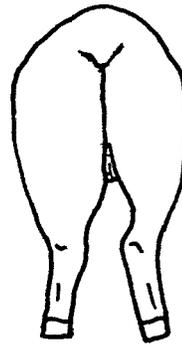
Feet, Legs, Bone

Strong, straight legs and pasterns with adequate bone are essential for breeding sheep. Hind legs that are too straight (post legs) will contribute to lameness and difficulty in moving in breeding animals. The legs should be of ample bone, wide set and squarely placed under the animal. The pasterns should be short and strong with the toes rather close together. Pasterns that are flat or crooked in a young animal worsen as the animal ages and contribute to difficult movement. To produce well the breeding animal should move freely and easily with no evidence of unsoundness.

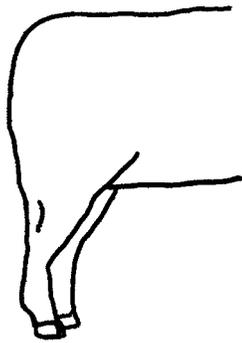
Some of the defects which cause unsoundness in the feet and legs of sheep are shown below.



Sickle hocked
(too much set to the hocks)



Cow hocked
(hocks too close together)



Post Legs
(too little set to the hocks)



Weak Pastern
(short, strong pasterns desired)

Fleece

Inspect the fleece and mention it in your reasons if it is a factor in your placing. Remember that the finest wool quality is found at the side of the shoulder and the coarsest quality wool is found at the breech (hind leg).

Visual grading of wool is a specialized skill requiring training and experience. However, generally look at these things when evaluating the fleece: fineness, length, density,

uniformity, character, purity, soundness, foreign matter, colour and covering. Look for a long fiber, a distinct wave and density in the fleece. The fleece should be uniform in grade or fineness from shoulder to breech (hind leg). A bright fleece and pink skin indicate a healthy animal.

For more information on the wool or fleece, look at the Sheep Project Manual, Unit 17 - Wool.

Scorecard For Breeding Sheep

	Perfect Score	
	Wool Breeds	Meat Breeds
Body Conformation	25	40
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skeletal structure • muscling is more important than condition • size and scale of animal should be according to breed 		
Feet, Legs and Bone	20	20
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong, straight legs with heavy bone are a must in breeding sheep • legs set on four corners of body • sound feet and legs 		
Breed and Sex Character.....	20	20
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rams should be masculine with strong bones • ewes should be more refined • characteristics should be according to breed 		
Fleece	25	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • black fiber is not desirable • the finest quality wool in the fleece is found at the side of the shoulder • length - long fiber is desirable character - look for a distinct wave density • fleece should be clean, shiny and uniform in grade or fineness from shoulder to breech (hind leg) • bright fleece and pink skin indicate a healthy animal 		
General Appearance.....	10	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall appearance should be pleasing • proportionately balanced throughout 		
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total	100	100

Source: Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency

Breed Standards Of Excellence

To help you understand more about the differences between the breeds, this chart summarizes the characteristics of three common breeds.

	Suffolk	Dorset	Hampshire
Head	black face hornless long muzzle wrinkle free	neat, white face large nostrils broad muzzle wool covered crown	open faced wool cap hornless brown or black polled or horned
Ears	long, bell shaped black fine textured flip up on ends bright full	medium size medium length short white hair prominent bright	medium size long, thick free of wool dark in colour
Neck	moderate length well blended wrinkle free	moderate length trim, well set wrinkle free	moderate length well set wrinkle free
Chest	moderately deep well defined	moderately deep well defined	moderately deep well defined
Back	long, straight strong long, thick loin long level rump moderate capacity	long, straight strong adequate length long, thick loin long, level rump moderate capacity	long, straight strong long, level rump long, thick loin long from rib to dock strong top
Legs	black long, straight well placed	moderately long free of wool muscular rear legs	long, straight well placed free of wool muscular rear legs
Feet	short, strong toes close	short, strong toes close white hooves	short, strong toes close
Fleece	dense no black fibers uniform	dense no black fibers uniform	good length no black fibers dense uniform
Skin	fine, soft, pink	soft, pink	pink

For more information on these breeds, contact the sheep breed associations or the Canadian Sheep Breeders Association.

Breeding Sheep Terminology

When you judge breeding sheep, give attention to size, soundness, breed character, length and muscling. Your sheep should walk freely and easily. Rams should be masculine. Ewes should be feminine and more refined.

The following terms are samples of the terms you should be using in your reasons when judging breeding sheep.

Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibited more size, scale and volume • Larger framed, growthier ewe with more size and scale • More width to her chest floor • More spring to her rib • More overall capacity • Bigger, stretchier ewe with more length to hindsaddle • More width and depth of heart and overall spring of rib
Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showed more breed character about the head • More feminine headed (ewes) • More masculine headed (rams) • More open faced • Suffolk head - blacker about the head and ears • Longer, cleaner, more feminine head • Longer ear with a more desirable set
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavier boned, straighter legged, squarer standing ewe • More upstanding, longer legged ewe with more structural correctness • Larger framed, heavier boned ewe • Taller at the point of the shoulder • Greater length of hindsaddle
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoother fronted, blended more smoothly in the shoulder • More width through the chest floor, more boldness to the rib • Bigger volumed ewe with more total capacity • Deeper, wider chested ewe with more substance and volume

Muscling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuller behind the shoulder • Wider in the stifle region • Carried out longer and squarer to the dock • A heavier muscled ewe with more natural thickness down the top • More thickness over the loin and more volume of muscle to the leg • Stronger topped, thicker muscled ewe • Longer rumped and thicker through the leg • A ewe with more natural thickness throughout the body • More muscling over the top and more flare to the rump
Condition	<p>When judging the breeding ewe, mention condition only if the ewe is very fat or very thin.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fat, over conditioned ewe • An extremely under conditioned ewe • A thin, under conditioned ewe
Quality, Balance, Femininity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher quality, more balanced ewe • More feminine head and more free of wool about the eye • Longer necked, cleaner fronted ewe • Typier ewe with more eye appeal • Longer, smoother necked ewe • More stylish ewe showing more smoothness and quality • Neater fronted ewe • Smoother shouldered ewe
Fleece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A longer, denser fleece • More uniform, denser fleece free of black fibers

Sample Reasons - Hampshire Breeding Ewes

I placed this class of Hampshire breeding ewes 4 2 3 1.

I placed 4 over 2 because 4 was a stretchier ewe showing more size, scale and Hampshire breed character than 2. 4 was wider over the shoulder, back and loin, fuller in the heart and longer and leveler in the rump than 2. I grant that 2 stood straighter on her front legs and has a denser fleece than 4.

I placed 2 over 3 because 2 showed a straighter topline and more spring of rib than 3. 2 was wider fronted and wider and stronger through the loin than 3. 2 was tighter in her fleece and stood straighter on her front legs than 3. I admit that 3 was more open faced and deeper bodied than 2.

I placed 3 over 1 because 3 was longer bodied, more balanced and more open faced than 1. 3 showed more thickness over the top, and was longer, leveler and squarer in the rump than 1. I grant that 1 was stronger over the top than 3.

I placed 1 at the bottom of the class because 1 was the smallest ewe in the class, and was narrow in her rump and light in her leg.

These are my reasons for placing this class of Hampshire breeding ewes 4 2 3 1.

Primary Purpose of Sheep Breeds

The following table lists the primary purpose of sheep breeds in North America.

Meat	Wool	Dual Purpose	Dairy
Border Cheviot	Bluefaced Leicester	Border Leicester	East Friesian
Clun Forest	Cotswold	Columbia	
Dorpor	Delaine Merino	Coopworth	
Dorset	Icelandic	Corriedale	
Hampshire	Karakul	Finn	
Katahdin	Leicester Longwool	Lincoln	
Montadale	Rambouillet	Perendale	
North Country Cheviot	Shetland	Polypay	
Oxford	Targhee	Romney	
Romanov			
Royal White			
Shropshire			
Southdown			
St. Croix			
Suffolk			
Texel			
Tunis			
Wiltshire Horn			