

Fitting Sheep for Show

Market Lamb

1. Most market lambs are sheared at least twice before preparing to show. At this point, the lamb may have 1/4 inch to 1/2 inch of wool, but this may vary according to the last shearing. During show season the wool may be only 1/10 inch between shows.
2. Wash the animal with a livestock soap such as Orvis or any mild, commercial liquid dish soap such as Ivory or Dove. Work the soap into the wool to remove the dirt and grease. Rinse the wool thoroughly to remove all the soap. Remove the excess water with a towel. After this is done, allow the wool to air-dry or dry the wool with a blow-dryer.
3. Shear the animal. Market lambs should be “slicked sheared.” Various types of shearing machines with different blades could be used, depending on personal choice. Start at the top of the animal and shear as close to the skin as possible. Move in a horizontal direction to all parts of the body. The shearing should include the animal’s head, neck, body, belly, and legs to the knees and hock. The lamb is sheared closely so the judge can clearly see the amount of muscle and fat cover he must evaluate.

Before taking the lamb off the stand, examine for places where the wool is left rough or slightly longer. A lamb should have a uniform, short fleece. Evaluate how the lamb stands; it might need its feet trimmed so it can stand correctly. However, it is advisable to trim the lamb’s feet at least one week before showing.

Breeding Sheep

1. Before preparing for the show, many breeding sheep are systematically sheared at various times to create wool with various lengths. These lengths may vary from 1/4 inch to over 1/2 inch, depending on the part of the body.
2. Wash the breeding sheep with Orvis or any mild, commercial liquid dish soap such as Ivory or Dove. Work soap into the wool to remove dirt and grease. Rinse all soap thoroughly from the wool. Excess water may be removed by blow-drying, rubbing with a towel, or air-drying.
3. Once the wool is dry, card with a #2 card until the wool is pulled out and ready to clip with hands shears. Clip off the wool, being careful to shape wool to make areas more desirable to judge. Recard if necessary. Shear the belly and crotch with electric clippers to enhance the shape of the animal. Do not wash the wool of wool breeds. Very little clipping is required for the exhibition. The judge wants to be able to determine the true crimp and color of the wool.

Sheep Production

Showing Etiquette

When planning for show day, the animal is not the only one that should be prepared. A good exhibitor must keep several things in mind before, during, and after showing the lamb.

A good exhibitor should be appropriately dressed in clean clothes such as jeans or slacks and a nice shirt but not be overdressed. For safety reasons, leather boots are preferred because they will protect the exhibitor's feet. It is not appropriate to wear hats or caps in the show ring because they can distract the judge. By having a tucked-in shirt, a belt, and minimal jewelry, the exhibitor is displaying a positive appearance for the judge.

Before entering the ring, observe how the judge is handling the show. Watch how he/she has the exhibitors set up their animals and how the judge handles the lambs. Knowing the judge's techniques helps the exhibitor maintain composure when entering the show ring.

While in the show ring the exhibitor should remain calm and at ease. An effective exhibitor has a pleasant facial expression and always knows where the judge is. The judge may want the exhibitor to move the animal. If the exhibitor is not paying attention, an opportunity may be missed to show off the lamb.

Demonstrating courtesy to all exhibitors in the show ring is essential. Once the winners have been selected, congratulate the winners and encourage those who did not win by remarking on things they did well during the show. Always remember to be gracious and polite, perform as well as possible, and have fun. This is a learning experience that will help exhibitors improve on mistakes and start preparing for the next show.

Techniques for Showing Breeding Sheep

When showing sheep, the exhibitor leads the animal around the show ring by placing his/her left hand under the animal's chin. If the animal does not want to walk, the exhibitor may put his/her hand under the lamb's chin and the other hand on the animal's dock. The exhibitor always leads the animal from the left-hand side.

To avoid blocking the judge's view of the sheep, the exhibitor always keeps the lamb between himself/herself and the judge. If the judge is at the animal's rump, the exhibitor should stand at the front of the animal with his/her hand under the lamb's chin. If the judge is at the head of the animal, the exhibitor should be on the sheep's left side facing the judge with his/her hand still under the chin. As the judge moves around the lamb, the exhibitor always moves out of the way so the judge can get the best view of the animal. Maintaining eye contact with the judge is essential in order to know what he/she wants done with the animal.

Showing Sheep

While showing, avoid the corners of the ring and any low spots. If the exhibitor is pushed into a corner, the judge may overlook the lamb. The low spots can make the exhibitor's animal look smaller compared to the others or may cause the lamb to not set up properly. Each exhibitor should always remember to leave plenty of space between himself/herself and the other exhibitors in the ring so the judge can get a good look at all the animals.

In most show rings there are other people called ring men or ring women who help the judge get the animals set up correctly. The exhibitor should watch the ring helpers for directions. They will indicate when and where to move the sheep in the show ring.

Proper Handling in the Show Ring for Market Lambs

When entering the ring, the lamb should be walked in at a slow pace with its head up so the judge can evaluate it.

The exhibitor should ensure that as the lamb is placed in line, all four of its feet are squarely placed under the animal, with its head up high and ears forward.

To restrain and prevent the animal from moving while in the show ring, the exhibitor may place his/her leg at the front of the lamb so it does not move forward. It may also be necessary to place a hand on the dock of the animal. The exhibitor should always remember to try to avoid blocking the judge's view of the sheep.

As the judge handles the lamb in order to evaluate it, the exhibitor uses his/her knee or leg to apply pressure to the lamb's breastbone. By applying pressure to the animal in this manner it gives the sheep's muscle tone much greater definition and firmness in the rump and leg area. This technique must be practiced and taught to the sheep before showing. This technique goes by many different names such as rumping, bracing, and driving.

Care of Lambs at the Fair

The exhibitor must ensure that lambs are watered daily so they do not become dehydrated. Moving to the show sometimes causes stress in sheep, and they may stop eating. Including small amounts of high-quality roughage in the lamb's diet, such as alfalfa hay, is an important preventive measure. This helps prevent stress and rumen upset. Many lambs normally begin to eat the next day after being stressed. The exhibitor should also monitor the lambs to make sure they do not get sick.

During hot summer shows, prevent the sheep from overheating by using fans to circulate the air. Taking sheared lambs to the wash rack periodically and rinsing with water are also advised.

If the lamb must be at a show for several days, the exhibitor should do the following every day: (1) exercise the lamb, (2) include roughage in the diet, and (3) provide access to clean water.

Sheep Production

Credits:

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