



CANADA  
4-H Manitoba

# FITTING AND SHOWING YOUR SHEEP



## First Impressions Count

You may not be able to judge a book by its cover but in the show ring general appearance is the first thing a livestock judge notices. The first impression is important, so take good care to have your lamb as well groomed as possible.

## 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 show ring, the lamb should stand quietly with the front and hind legs squared beneath them.. 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 and hind saddle flexed when someone touches 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 the lamb's brisket to cause the lamb to arch or bend its back. Do not choke the lamb or grasp so hard that you hurt the animal.

## Grooming your Lamb

### 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.

## 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.

## 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:

- Clean manure and dirt from the bottom of the foot and between the toes.
- Slowly and carefully remove the outer wall of the hoof until it is level with the sole or the bottom of foot.
- Be careful not to trim to the point that the hoof bleeds.
- Trim the dewclaws if necessary.
- Be sure that the hind feet do not touch any obstacles (floor, wall, a part of your body) because it makes the lamb kick.

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

## Washing Your Lamb

### TIPS:



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).

Be sure that the hind feet do not touch any obstacles such as the floor, a wall or even your body because it makes the lamb kick.

Your lamb can be washed in a tub of warm soapy water or by placing it on the trimming stand. 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 dish soap. Rinse well using a hose so that all product is removed.



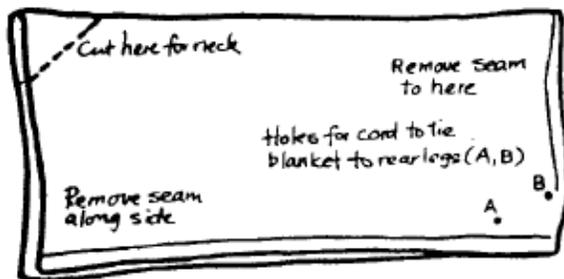
Remove excess moisture from the fleece with your hand or with a flat surface such as the back of a wool card. Dry the fleece with a terry cloth towel or carefully with your hair dryer or livestock blower. Keep the hair dryer moving – it will BURN the skin if held too long in one spot.

Clean hooves with a damp cloth. Clean out ears, eyes and nose using a soft damp cloth.

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 aids in keeping 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 pillow case. Open a case 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 case. A twine loop or cotton string for the rear legs will hold the blanket in place. A second string can be added so that it ties in

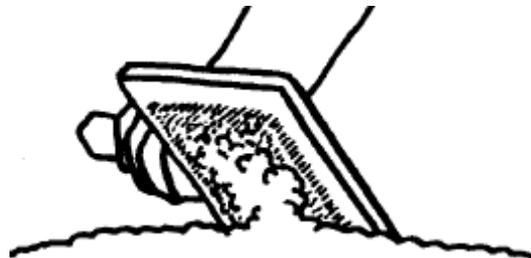
front off the navel. Commercial blankets come in various sizes and may be available at your local livestock supply store.

## 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:

- pat card into fleece;
- roll card out of fleece.

Never try to rake the card through the fleece.

## Trimming

The purpose of trimming a lamb is to remove fleece over the entire body. Be aware of the show's guidelines with regard to wool length. Often a desired length is about 0.75 to 1 cm. is appropriate however some shows may require more, less or indicate "slick shearing" as the preference.

The last trimming should be done carefully so the fleece is smooth and ready for the show. You will only need to dampen, card and trim off the rough edges the day of the fair.

Preparation of your animal will depend on the type of animal:

- breed. Meat vs wool vs dual purpose
- breeding/production sheep vs market lamb



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.

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:

- 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.

- Use a curry comb to drag the fleece. This breaks the crimp and makes for a smoother look. Card the wool after dragging.
- 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.
- Place the shears flat on the surface to be trimmed and tilt slightly up.
- Move the shears forward so the bottom blade glides slowly and smoothly. Do not move your thumb when trimming.
- As the bottom blades move forward, clip the fleece by repeatedly pulling the top blade back to the bottom blade and releasing it.
- As you trim, stop often and dip the shears in water to clean them. Always keep the blades damp when trimming.

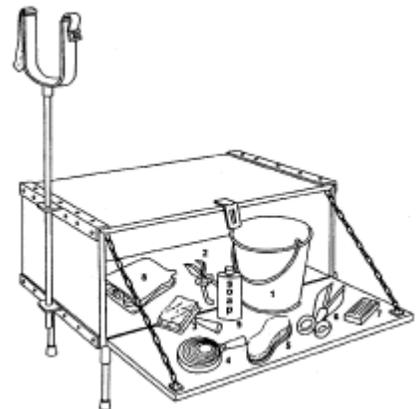
### What Equipment DO You Need?

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 on show day.

#### Items for Your Tack Box

1. Bucket or pail
2. Hoof trimmers
3. Wool Card
4. Curry comb or wool rake
5. Rags and scraps of cloth to clean ears, flanks, shears or dry the fleece
6. Brush
7. Whetstone
8. Trimming shears
9. Sheep halter



## SHOWMANSHIP

Showmanship is important because it allows you to show off your sheep to the judge. Showmanship should be employed in all classes whether they are breed and marketing classes or those designate as showmanship classes. When exhibiting sheep the animal should be under the perfect control of the exhibitor.

### General Tips for Showmanship

- Always try to keep the sheep between the judge and yourself. You may need to switch sides or turn the sheep to make this possible.
- Only move around the front of the sheep, do not walk around or step over the back.
- Keeping eye contact with the judge is important. It shows you are alert and interested. Keep your eye on the judge and your animal at all times
- When stopped, stay crouched. Avoid kneeling, stand only when necessary.



### Showmanship Etiquette

- Be sure you and your clothes are neat and clean. Check the show guidelines or standards for specific clothing requirements. Do not chew gum.
- Be alert, polite and courteous to the judge and other show people. Always be on time for a show.
- 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.
- Keep your animal under control at all times and make frequent glances at the judge to watch for his/her directions.
- Be prepared to lead any animal that the judge designates.
- Be prepared to answer questions that would normally be asked by a judge about a lamb such as birth date, breed line, diet., etc.
- Avoid grandstanding or showing off. Don't be sidetracked by members of the audience.
- Always shake hands with the champion and the reserve champion. Sportsmanship is a big part of the show!

## 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:

- **Entering the show ring.** Leave enough space between your sheep and the next sheep. If your sheep has a lot of space around it, it will stand out to the judge.
- **Walking in the circle around the show ring.**
  - If the judge is in the centre of the ring walk slowly around the ring, maintaining your distance from the other exhibitors. The sheep should move at a fairly slow and even pace with its back level and head in normal position.
  - If the judge is at the side of the ring, walk around the circle but as you approach the judge turn the sheep's head in towards your stomach and switch hands. This will give the judge a 360 degree view of your animal and will move you to the other side of the animal so that when you walk in front of the judge your back is not facing them. Once you have passed in front of the judge, switch back to the other side of the animal and continue around the circle.



- **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.
- **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:
  - by pushing or pulling toward or away from the wrongly positioned foot, using the same cheek grasp.
  - by lifting the off-positioned foot by hand.

- **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 inner thigh against the brisket to prevent bolting when the judge is handling the sheep.



- **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.

- **Judge moves to the front of sheep 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.



- **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.)
- **Judge asks you, the exhibitor, to move sheep or bring sheep to the front.** 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. Stop the sheep a few feet from the judge and pose it correctly.
- **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 easiest accomplished by the quick lift and drop of fore-quarters and hand-placing of hind feet.
- **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.
- 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, so it can not bolt.



## SHOWMANSHIP SCORECARD

A. FITTING	20 points
- Condition	
- Cleanliness	
- Trimming and/or grooming	
- Condition of hooves	
B. TRAINING AND SHOWING ANIMAL	30 points
- Evidence of previous training	
- Handling of project animal	
- Posing of project animal	
- Project animal's response to exhibitor's movements	
- Indication of good knowledge of animal's faults and habits	
C. RING MANNERS AND APPEARANCE OF SHOWMAN	50 points
- Clothes neat, clean and suitable to occasion	
- Full attention given to the job at hand	
- Is on time, alert and aware of the judge, responds to judge's requests	
- Courteous and polite to other exhibitors and judge	
- Knowledge of project animal's pedigree, care and management program	
TOTAL POINTS	100 POINT

For more information on judging sheep these fact sheets available from MAFRD will be of assistance:

- Let's Judge - general judging information including presenting written and oral reasons.
- Judging Sheep - includes information on market lambs and breeding animals.

Sections of the Fitting and Showing Your Sheep were adapted from the Ontario 4-H Fitting and Showing Your Sheep manual with permission from the Ontario 4-H Council. Additional information has been included from Alberta 4-H Sheep Level I with the permission of the Alberta 4-H Council and the British Columbia 4-H Sheep Manual with the permission of the British Columbia 4-H Council

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