



CANADA
4-H Manitoba

BASIC CARE GUIDE FOR LAMBS

Caring for your project lamb is a great responsibility. It can be very rewarding and a great skill building experience.

This fact sheet will indicate the initial needs of your project lamb. You will learn more through the course of your 4-H project.

Choosing a Lamb

It is helpful to first determine the type of lamb you wish to buy or select.

Your plans for your lamb after achievement day will affect your decision. If you are starting a ewe flock you will need a breeding ewe lamb.

If you wish to enter the lamb in a market auction or sell it as a freezer lamb a market ewe lamb or wether (castrated ram) would be suitable.

A crossbred lamb will be cheaper and can sometimes exhibit more desirable traits due to the effect of heterosis (hybrid vigor). However if you wish to show your ewe lamb in the open pure breed shows you will need a registered purebred.

Where to Buy a Lamb

Local flocks and neighbours will often sell lambs and are handy for advice if needed.

Purebred Sheep Breeders' associations can provide you with a directory of breeders who have

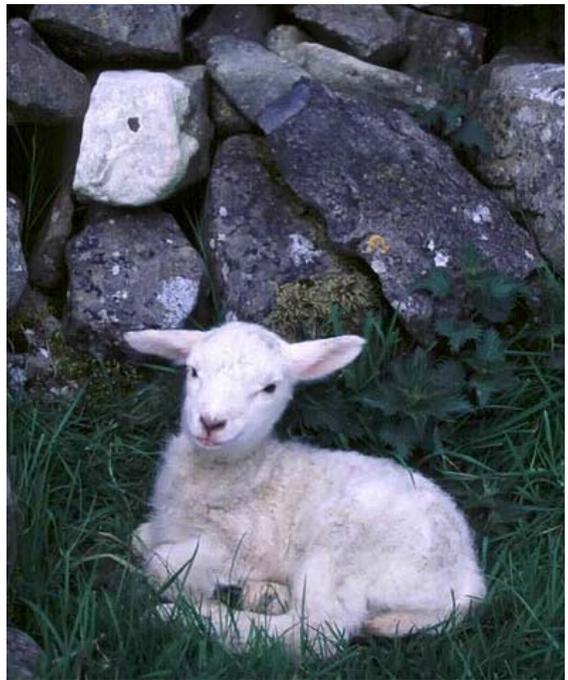


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breeding stock to sell. Some Associations hold breeding stock auction sales which can be a good opportunity to purchase stock as well. Make sure you know what prices should be before attending so you are not tempted to spend more than you should.

Housing

Lambs are capable of living outside but require a small shelter. Keeping sheep contained in a shed or small lit yard at night can help prevent predator attacks.

A **fenced paddock or pasture** will encourage exercise and allow them to graze which is an excellent cost effective feed source. Fencing can be **page wire mesh fencing, electric fencing strands or electric net fencing**. Electric fence is easy to move as the grass is eaten.

Make sure that the indoor areas lambs use are **well bedded** to keep them clean and dry.

If lambs are kept inside in a pen, it needs to be big enough to allow them adequate exercise and excellent ventilation. The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Sheep (National Farm Animal Care Council) has the following recommendation:

Table 2.1: Minimum Recommended Floor Space Requirements for Sheep

	Ewes or Rams	Feeder Lambs
Feedlot (m²/head [ft²/head])		
Hard surfaced	1.4 [16]	0.6 [6.5]
Soil	6.5 [70]	2.8 [30]
Open front shed floor area (m²/head [ft²/head])		
Pregnant ewe	1.4 [15]	0.6 [6.5]
Ewe and lamb(s)	1.5 [16]	
Ram	1.0 [11]	
Dry ewe	0.93 [10]	
Ceiling height (min) 2.7m (9 ft) 2.7m (9 ft)		

Feed

#1 most important is fresh water at all times. If the container holds more than the lamb drinks in a day or two, or the water becomes soiled -dump it out and replace it with fresh water. Keeping the water in the shade helps keep it cool and prevents algae growth.

- Good quality feed will maximize the growth and health of the lamb. Hay or good pasture and a grain supplement are needed.
- How much you feed will depend on whether you are growing a lamb for market or breeding, and how much condition (fat) the lamb is putting on.
- Lambs should have as much hay or pasture as they can eat. This may be approximately 1.4kg or 3lbs per day per lamb.

- Whole grains such as corn, barley or oats can be fed at approximately .68kg or 1.5 lbs per day.
- Lambs also need small amounts of a sheep minerals premix and loose cobalt iodized salt which can be fed free choice to lambs on whole grain and hay or pasture.
- Rather than feeding separate whole grain and minerals, complete feeds can also be purchased. They are balanced to provide a consistent level of protein energy and minerals. Be certain the feeds are recommended for sheep.
- They are to be fed with hay or pasture and do not require a mineral fed in addition to the complete feed. Ask your local feed store what you should be feeding and don't forget to tell them you are feeding a 4-H lamb. Often they will give you a discount on supplies for 4-H projects.

It is better to split the daily feeding for lambs in two and feed in the morning and at night. This will allow their stomachs to digest a consistent amount of feed throughout the day, rather than all at once.

Health

A healthy lamb is alert and active. They will frisk and run and jump with other lambs.

Wool should be thick and fluffy. A long open fleece on a small lamb indicates the lamb is older and poorly grown. Wool lacking in sheen or which looks grimy indicates poor health. Patchy wool is also a sign of parasites or a fever.



Bluefaced Leicester Lambs. Photo: Paul. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

When lambs appear unwell or in poor health the first thing to do is check their temperature. Normal temperature for a lamb is 38.3-39.4 degrees Celsius (100.9- 103.0 degrees Fahrenheit). A high temperature indicates an infection and a low temperature indicates metabolic disorder. When you call a vet they will want to know this information.

All lambs should be vaccinated when they are over 30 days of age. Before that the immunity they have received from the ewe will prevent the vaccine from working. The vaccine should protect against the clostridial diseases such as pulpy kidney and tetanus which are common in areas of Canada.

All lambs should be dewormed (consult the Health section of the resource manual for more information on deworming) for internal and external parasites. Ask your vet which wormer to use. If the wormer is not effective against external parasites you will need to identify and treat for them separately. Examples of these types of external parasites are lice and keds.

Handling and Training

While the process of training the lamb is explained in more detail in Fitting and Showing Your Lamb you should start with the basics as soon as your lamb is selected.

When you want to catch your lamb, crowd them into a small area. Do not chase them around in a large area. Always move slowly and gently when handling livestock. By treating them gently you are reassuring them that they are not going to be hurt and therefore they do not need to be afraid of you. A good way to start is to feed them out of your hand or by holding the bucket while they eat. Eventually they get comfortable with you and you can touch them while they eat. Then you can start handling their head, feet and legs.

A halter is handy for working with your lamb whether you are needling, checking its temperature or training. Tying the lamb up with its head tight teaches them to respect your control later when you are showing, even though you **do not show** with a halter on the lamb. Never leave a lamb alone when it is tied up, they can easily hang themselves or be injured. While supervising them, you may find it to be a great opportunity to train your lamb to set its feet up quickly and easily.

Basic Care Guide for Lambs was adapted from the
Ontario 4-H Basic Care Guide for Lambs with the permission of the
Ontario 4-H Council.

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