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Showing Market Lambs Starter Guide.



Overview:

Preparing for and showing livestock can be an extremely rewarding and educational experience for youth. The lessons learned in showing and raising livestock are invaluable. However, it can feel very intimidating to begin. This guide is a broad overview at how to prepare for showing market lambs. All exhibitors are encouraged to ask questions as they grow through the program.



How to prepare for purchasing your animal:

Before purchasing an animal and bringing it home, it is important to consider the needs of that animal. First, do you have a well fenced area? It is recommended to have at least a 8x10 foot space for each market lamb. This will give ample room for them to exercise. It is also important to consider feeders and waterers. When considering a feeder, remember to make it a goal to eliminate waste and protect your lambs from consuming debris like rocks. Lambs need to be provided with 2 lbs of water/lb of feed consumed daily, or approximately 1 gal/lamb/day. Ensure that buckets, tanks or troughs don't easily tip or break.

Your market lamb will also need a wind or snow break or some sort of shelter for them to escape the snow, rain, wind, hail, and other weather. Market lambs do better when they can see or interact with other lambs. You can easily convert buildings and sheds to suite the needs of your animals. Shade will also need to be ample in summer months to prevent over heating.



Purchasing your animal:

The majority of market lamb are purchased in the months of March and April. There are a number of producers across the state who hold sales this time. When purchasing a lamb, you will want to find one that is 2.5-3 months of age. You will also want to consider the weight of your lamb at the time of purchase to make sure they will likely reach county fair weight comfortably. Market lambs must weigh at least 95 pounds at the Jeffco 4-H Fair. Average Daily Gain (ADG) for sheep is 0.5 lbs. Below is how to calculate the weight your animal needs to be at time of purchase:

Calculate # of days on feed:

$$\text{Purchase date} - \text{weigh in date} = \text{total days on feed}$$

$$\text{April 13 to Aug 1} = 110 \text{ days}$$

Calculate Pounds to be gained:

$$\text{Total days on feed} \times \text{ADG} = \text{pounds to be gained}$$

$$110 \text{ days} \times 0.5 \text{ lbs ADG} = 55 \text{ lbs}$$

Find start weight:

$$\text{Target weight} - \text{total pounds to be gained} = \text{target starting weight}$$

$$135 \text{ lbs} - 55 \text{ lbs} = 80 \text{ lbs}$$



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Feeding your Animal:

There are many feeds available for your market lamb. You can do your research to determine which you feel most confident about. You can ask your breeder, leader and other livestock exhibitors for advice on what to feed. Below are the basic nutrients to look for in a feed.

Feeding Market Lambs

Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN): 65-75%

Protein: 12-20%

Pounds of feed: 5-6 lbs/day or 3% of body weight

It is of upmost importance that we maintain rumen health and function. Feeding grain-based diets without providing sufficient roughage in the lamb's diet can lead to unintended consequences. At minimum, each lamb should receive a double handful, or about ¼ lbs. (4 ounces) of a good-quality alfalfa hay per day. Water is also extremely important. Water is directly related to feed intake. The water source needs to be clean, fresh, abundant, and not too hot or cold at all times to ensure proper feed intake and growth performance. Keeping the lamb hydrated will also help prevent the occurrence of urinary calculi. Sheep are herding- or flocking-type creatures, and two lambs do much better than one by itself. Lambs eat and perform much better when a companion or pen mate is present



Halter Breaking & Walking Without a Halter:

Halter breaking is all about patience and practice. Go slow and don't rush the process. Start while they are young. Your goal is to earn the animal's trust and respect. You're building a relationship with your animal and that takes time, plain and simple. Be gentle and be willing to devote time to the effort of teaching your animal to respect the halter. After they have grown to trust you, slowly start walking the animal without the halter, a little at a time. To build trust be regular in your interactions with the animal. Develop a routine and stick with it. Soon the animal will know what to expect from you and will learn to respond accordingly. No two animals are the same and some will be more stubborn than others. Be confident and consistent in your approach.



Teaching to Brace

Once you have accomplished walking with your lamb, you can start working on bracing. To brace your lamb, you will want to set their legs square, not stretching them out too far. Make sure the lamb's neck is at a 90 degree angle. To brace, the lamb should be pushing against your body, not being pulled on by their head, ears or neck. Keep your hands soft and cradle the jaw and ear and encourage the lamb to push against your inner thigh. If the lamb tries to back up instead of pushing, you can turn them to where their hocks are against a fence or wall. Just do not take frustrations out on your animal. Try to work with a parent, sibling, or friend so they can give feedback on leg placement. Or, you can use a large mirror to watch yourself. Practice daily so this becomes a habit for the animal.



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Showing in the Show Ring

In the show ring, you will follow a line of lambs. There are a variety of patterns a judge can do, so pay attention. When stopping, make sure to give enough space to the people in front of or behind you. You will want to brace your lamb when the judge comes to handle it.



Shearing a Lamb for Show

- To make shearing your lamb easier, you will likely want a shearing stand. Adjust the stand to where the animals head is held at a 90 degree angle
- You will want to wash your lamb very well. Dirt and debris left behind are very hard on clippers and will make your shear less smooth.
- To clip the belly, keep the skin stretched. This will allow the shears to obtain a smoother shear job and prevent nicking or cutting the lamb. Pay close attention not to cut or nick the sheath (penis), teats, or fore and rear flanks.
- Begin shearing the body by making two upward shearing strokes per strip from the base of the foreleg over the top of the shoulder and back. Upward strokes will make the lamb look taller and trimmer. Only clip from the knee and hocks up.
- The strokes on the neck should be lengthwise to emphasize the length and trimness of the lamb. To shear the region at the base of the neck and shoulders, remove the lamb's head from the stand and hold the head. Again, pull the skin tight to obtain a smooth and uniform clip.
- For the legs, sheer above the knee and hock and leave wool longer below. Longer leg wool should be carded and trimmed to create an over-all appearance of balance.



Common Health Concerns

- Orf Virus (Sore Mouth): Sore mouth presents with sores on the lips, nose and inside of the mouth. It resolves after 3-4 weeks. You may see lowered feed intake during an outbreak. It can spread to humans so wash hands, halters, and muzzles.
- Flystrike: After periods of high moisture, flies will feed on lambs under their wool which cause sores. You also will see flies that can feed on the vulvas of sheep. Control flies in barns
- Fungus: Fungus is what ringworm is called on sheep. It causes circular lesions in the skin and hair loss. It is highly contagious and can spread to humans. Prevent fungus by washing lambs with Ringout or something similar after shows or weigh ins. Also, wash blankets, halters, etc after events. Treat with a fungal ointment.



Approximate Project Expenses

Livestock projects can really add up in cost. It is important to ensure that you can afford your project before buying animals. It also is important to consider what you are likely to make from your project to offset the cost. Below is a breakdown:

Cost of purchasing your animal: \$300-\$1,000/lamb

Cost of feed:

$$\# \text{ of Bags of Feed Needed} = (\text{Pounds of Gain Needed} \times \text{Feed Conversion Ratio}) / 50 \text{ lbs}$$
$$(55 \text{ lbs} \times 5 \text{ lbs}) = 275 \text{ lbs} / 50 \text{ lbs} = 5.5 \text{ bags (round up to 6 bags)}$$

$$6 \text{ bags of feed} \times \$28.00 \text{ (appx cost of 50 lb bag of feed)} = \underline{\$168.00/lamb}$$

Cost of vet/health: \$200/lamb (estimation but should be budgeted into figure)

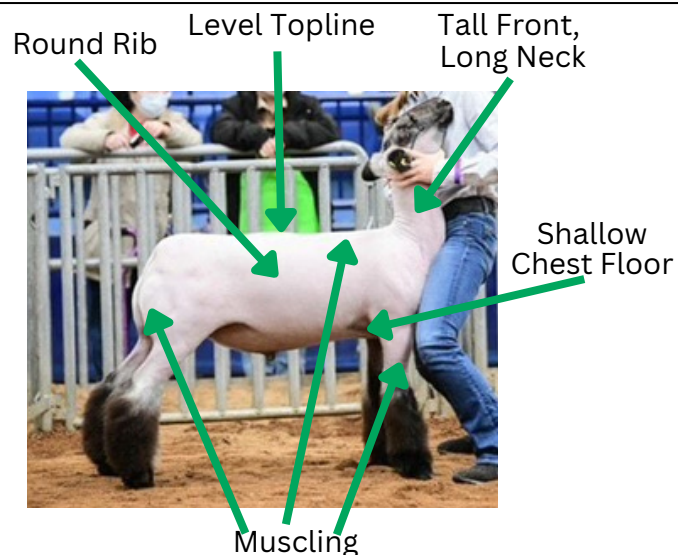
Supplies: \$200/head (Estimation but should be budgeted into figure)

Total Cost: \$868-1,568/lamb

Approximate Jeffco 4-H Sale Price (Auction or Private Treaty): \$500-1,000

Selecting Market Lambs

You want your lambs to be wide constructed with good muscling behind their shoulders, down their spine, and through their leg and forearm. Good lambs will also be able to move unrestricted and have a 45 degree angle at their shoulder. You also want them to ‘balance’ well. This means that the front 1/3 matches the middle and end 1/3's. Basically, all the pieces fit together. They will be tall fronted and shallow chested and have a long neck.



Sources and Resources

- <https://ag.umass.edu/crops-dairy-livestock-equine/fact-sheets/housing-working-facilities-for-sheep>
- <https://www.purinamills.com/show-feed/education/detail/feeding-show-lambs-basic-show-lamb-nutrition>
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- <https://www.wyoming4h.org/4hsublette/wp-content/uploads/L2-Market-Sheep-Getting-Started.pdf>
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Adapted from Phillips County (Jessie Salyards, 4-H Specialist)