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FEEDING, MANAGING, AND EXHIBITING LAMBS

By Richard H. Simms

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This circular was prepared by RICHARD H. SIMMS, Livestock Extension Specialist. The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of E. E. Hatfield, U. S. Garrigus, G. E. Ricketts, and H. G. Russell of the Department of Animal Science.

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FEEDING, MANAGING, AND EXHIBITING LAMBS

THERE IS NO MAGIC RATION OR FORMULA for producing top-quality lambs. The basis of successful lamb production is an adequately balanced feeding program and a progressive breeding program, both of which must be accompanied by good management practices.

Lambs should be at their peak of condition and bloom when marketed, presented for exhibition, or sold at purebred sheep sales. They should be fed and handled in as practical and efficient a manner as possible. This circular explains how good flock management, with the use of farm-grown feedstuffs and a small amount of purchased protein and mineral supplements, can bring lambs to the proper condition for sale or exhibition. It also discusses the techniques needed in preparing a lamb for show. Good trimming techniques usually require some experience as well as ability, but if the procedures recommended in this circular are followed, the novice producer can compete satisfactorily with experienced sheepmen.

Developing Young Lambs

Dry feed is essential in a young lamb's diet. Lambs must be given an opportunity to consume small quantities of dry feed at an early age, since the milk supply of the ewe is greatly reduced after one month's lactation. Dry feed also hastens development of the young lamb's rumen, which in turn allows for more efficient digestion of dry matter before weaning.

Creep feeding of lambs

Feeding lambs in creep pens is a standard management practice in many Illinois winter-lambing operations. When feed is available, nursing lambs will normally begin nibbling hay leaves and grain mixtures at six to ten days of age. A creep pen which is easily accessible to lambs will provide the supplemental feed required for their maximum growth. Twin lambs are especially responsive to the provision of grain or hay in a creep feeder.

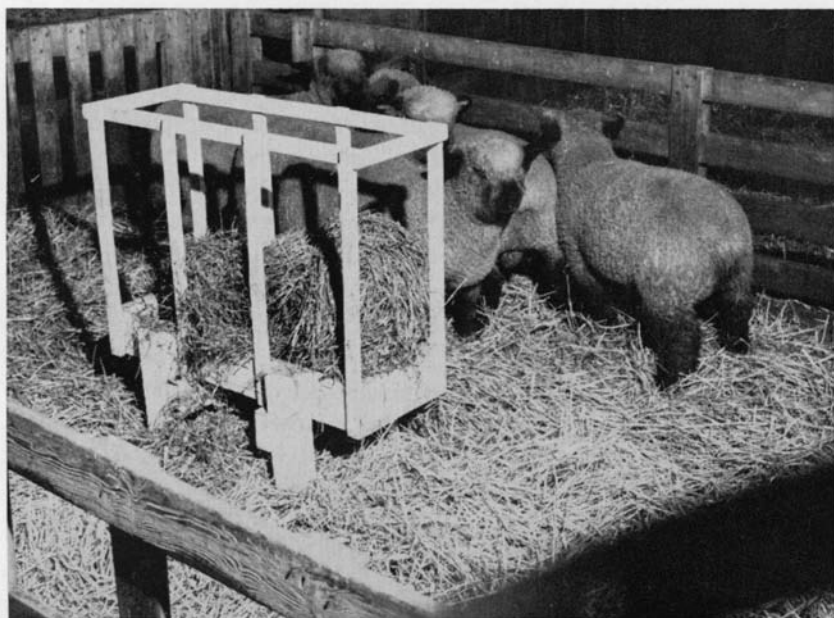
Creep pens

Creep-feeding pens can be easily and simply constructed from panels containing slats or rollers which are spaced narrowly enough so that older sheep cannot enter. The creep pen should be convenient for lambs to enter. It should have a grain and possibly a hay rack, and kept dry with clean bedding at all times. The creep pen should be located close to the bedding area of the ewes, and have a clean, fresh supply of water. A heat bulb will attract the lambs.

Creep-fed lambs will normally grade higher when marketed, and are usually more uniform than lambs that have not had the benefit of creep feed. They will also grow faster and more efficiently. Only one-third to one-fifth as much feed is required per pound of gain for the young, suckling lamb as compared to older, weaned individuals. In addition to the ewe's milk, from 1 to 2 pounds of creep feed is usually required for each pound of lamb gain.



Supplementary feed will allow lambs to grow uniformly and efficiently. Here lambs are taking their supplementary feed from a creep feeder.



Clean feed troughs are essential for maximum performance of weaned lambs.

Preparing rations

Adequate lamb creep rations can be formulated from farm-grown feeds. Except for early-weaned lambs, purchased protein supplements need not be included if high-quality legume hay is available. Cracked corn or possibly a corn-oat grain mixture will furnish energy in the ration.

Consumption of a creep feed is normally increased when the ration includes a variety of palatable feeds. Many veteran sheepmen add wheat at the 5-percent level to lamb rations. This is a protective measure against Vitamin E deficiency or "stiff-lamb disease." Wheat bran may also be a desirable addition because of its palatability and its laxative nature.

Rations for the creep-feeding program can be prepared as:

Free-choice grain and hay — This is probably the simplest method of creep feeding lambs, and supposedly the cheapest way of preparing feed. It is probably used more extensively than the other methods.

Completely ground and mixed rations — Ground feed can in-

clude a large percentage of roughages in the creep feed, can be processed on many farms with existing equipment, and is usually a less expensive feedstuff than pelleted feed.

Pelleted feed—Pellets can utilize a greater percentage of roughages in the ration and will allow increased consumption of dry matter by the young lamb. The additional cost is usually offset by faster gains. When lambs are two months old and eating well, a pelleted ration can be partially replaced with cracked corn to reduce the cost of the feeding program.

It is extremely important that feed containers be kept clean and free from dirt or manure droppings, regardless of the method of creep feeding which is used. Lambs are extremely sensitive and will not consume contaminated feed. Neither will they eat clean feed from contaminated feed troughs. It is also important that clean, fresh water be available to lambs at all times. Suggested rations for creep feeding lambs under the different methods of feed preparation are shown in the table on page 7.

Managing the Growing Lamb

Thrifty lambs are best weaned when they are two to three months of age. Trouble may develop with the udders of ewes when their lambs have been weaned at younger ages. Where lambs are maintained in a confined area, they can be weaned at six to eight weeks of age under superior management conditions. Because of the increased equipment and additional feed and management requirements, a drylot confinement system for lambs is not advocated on most Illinois farms.

Many commercial sheep producers wean and market lambs in a milk-fat condition from pasture at three to four months of age. Lambs that cannot be marketed by mid-July should be shorn in order to "finish-out" during the hot summer months. Individuals that are lacking either in *weight* or in *finish* should also be fed in drylot or on a clean pasture until they are acceptable for market.

The summer pasture season may be a source of problems to many lamb producers. Warm summer months frequently result in intensive parasite infestations, improper pasture management, and inadequate nutrient intake of lambs. These problems are more likely to occur in late-spring lambing enterprises than in operations that practice lambing in the winter. The growth of individuals retained as replacement breeding stock may be hampered regardless of the season of birth.

**Five Suggested Creep Rations for Pelleted, Mixed,
and Free-Choice Programs**

Ration	1	2	3	4	5
Pelleted Creep Feed^a (percent)					
Shelled corn.....	37.5	50.0	30.0	.....	87.5
Ground ear corn.....	.....	.....	.....	55.0	.....
Alfalfa hay.....	.....	45.0	30.0	.....	.....
Dehy. alfalfa meal.....	40.0	.....	.....	30.0	.....
Whole oats.....	.....	.....	30.0	.....	.....
Soybean meal.....	10.0	.....	10.0	10.0	10.0
Molasses.....	.....	5.0	.....	5.0	.....
Cane sugar.....	10.0	.....	.....	.....	.....
Bone meal.....	1.0	(Free	(Free	(Free	1.0
Salt.....	0.5	choice)	choice)	choice)	0.5
Antibiotic-vitamin premix.....	1.0	Added	Added	Added	1.0
Ground and Mixed Ration^a					
Shelled corn.....	40.0	70.0	.....	25.0	.....
Ear corn.....	.....	.....	60.0	.....	30.0
Whole oats.....	15.0	.....	.....	.....	20.0
Molasses.....	5.0	.....	5.0	10.0	10.0
Soybean meal.....	.....	10.0	10.0	15.0	10.0
Alfalfa hay.....	40.0	20.0	.....	50.0	30.0
Dehy. alfalfa meal.....	.....	.....	25.0	.....	.....
Salt and minerals.....	.....	.....	(Free choice)		.....
Free-Choice Ration					
Cracked corn.....	60.0	60.0	40.0	75.0	.....
Crushed oats.....	40.0	30.0	40.0	.....	75.0
Molasses.....	.....	.....	10.0	5.0	10.0
Soybean meal.....	.....	10.0	10.0	20.0	15.0
Alfalfa hay.....	.....	.....	(Free choice)		.....
Salt and minerals.....	.....	.....	(Free choice)		.....

^a Antibiotics could be added at the rate of 7.5 mg. per pound of feed, or at a ratio of 15 grams per ton of ration.

Parasite Control

Thrifty, fast-gaining lambs are less prone to parasite damage than slow-gaining individuals. Nevertheless, parasites are the most costly problem facing sheepmen during the spring and summer months. External parasites, namely ticks, lice, and mites (scabies), can be adequately controlled by an annual treatment of dipping or spraying. Internal parasites are more difficult to eliminate, but their control will bring greater dividends than any other management practice.

Anthelmintic agents (drenching compounds) should be used in conjunction with other desirable practices rather than as the only preventive measure. Tapeworms, lungworms, nodular worms, and stomach worms can be reduced to sub-toxic levels by a regular drenching pro-



Productive pastures such as this one can be the basis of a profitable sheep enterprise.

gram. The medication or treatment should consist of drenchings at two-week intervals. Compounds such as micro-fine phenothiazine (10 microns or less), a copper-nicotine sulfate solution, a phenothiazine-lead arsenate mixture, and a commercial compound of thiabendazole should be used in a definite rotation.

Phenothiazine and thiabendazole are usually effective against the common species of stomach worms, while copper sulfate and lead arsenate are effective against tapeworms. All of the treatment materials mentioned may be effective in controlling lungworms and nodular worms. Regardless of the treatment which is selected, care should be observed in *following the labeled directions* at all times.

The following practices will usually curb intensive parasite infestations in flocks with relatively healthy sheep:

1. Rotating pastures at two- or three-week intervals, especially small pasture areas.
2. Providing a phenothiazine-salt mixture as a free-choice supplement to sheep on pasture.
3. Drenching all sheep at two-week intervals according to the level of infestation.
4. Isolating new animals before adding them to the flock.
5. Drenching and treating all purchased animals before adding them to the flock.
6. Using well-drained pasture areas.

Pasture management

Good pasture management practices aid in the production of healthy sheep and reduce the need for intensive parasite control measures. Exceptional lamb gains can be achieved during the summer pasturing months if good forage is available. Ideally, lambs should be maintained on a clean pasture throughout the summer months for optimum growth. During the summer, growing lambs can be housed under shelter during the day and pastured only at night when shade or watering facilities can be made available in the fields.

Place lambs on pasture only when the forage growth is at least 2 to 3 inches high. Be sure to provide a constant source of clean water, a free-choice mineral mixture, and an adequately-shaded area. Use a moderate stocking rate to prevent "over-close grazing" and, therefore, parasite contamination. Apply fertilizer to permanent pastures and maintain a proper soil fertility program. Grass-legume pasture mixtures will reduce the incidence of bloat. Clip the pastures to control weed growth and encourage regrowth of desirable plant species.



Cornfields can serve as an ideal lamb pasture during the summer and fall months.

Lambs that are being grown-out during the summer as replacement breeding stock or those being considered for the show ring, may be fed a limited amount of grain while grazing on legume pastures. The amount of feed needed will vary from 1 to 2 pounds daily depending on size of the lamb and quality of the pasture. Supplemental grain will serve as protection from bloat and will insure rapid gains.

Feeding lambs on pasture can be an especially important practice in the late summer months or during drouthy conditions when forage growth is sparse. A source of protein such as soybean or linseed meal may be added to the grain ration during late summer and fall when adverse climatic conditions most frequently occur. Although there is little difference in lamb performance, veteran sheepmen feel that linseed meal is preferable to soybean meal, since it may reduce scouring and add "bloom" to their lambs.

Growing rations

Rations listed below can be used as guides in the feeding program after lambs are weaned:

For early summer

Whole oats	50%	or	Whole oats	50%
Shelled corn	50%		Whole barley	50%

For late summer

Whole oats	50%		Whole oats	30%
Shelled corn	40%	or	Shelled corn	30%
Soybean meal	10%		Whole barley	30%
			Linseed meal	10%
		or		
			Whole oats	40%
			Shelled corn	10%
			Whole barley	40%
			Soybean meal	10%

Many veteran sheepmen in Illinois make use of pre-harvest cornfields as sources of clean pasture during late summer and early fall. Lambs should be shorn or at least "faced-out" before pre-harvest gleaning. Adequate water and mineral sources are the primary concern in providing a balanced ration in the cornfield pasture operation.

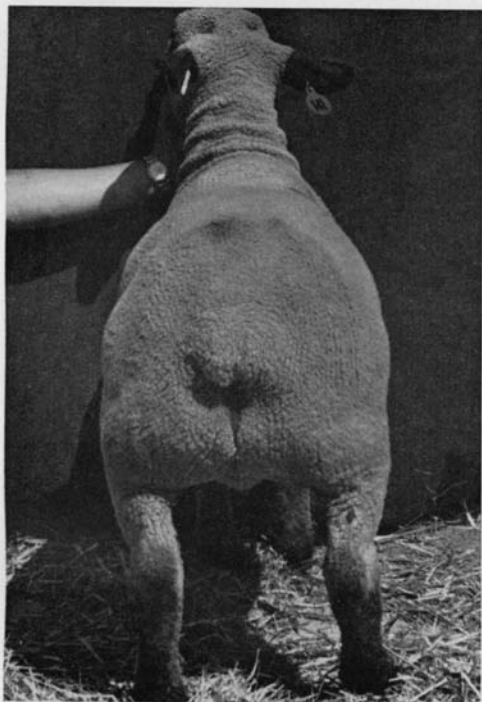
Lambs that are maintained during the summer as potential replacement breeding stock will grow faster during the warm months if they are shorn in June. Purebred sheepmen who exhibit at summer fairs usually shear their show lambs in August when the fair circuit is completed. Younger lambs or those not exhibited should be shorn before the warm summer season.

Selecting the Show Lamb

The selection of lambs for exhibition or consignment sale determines the kind of reputation the producer will develop. Characteristics that are most useful in commercial sheep production, and those that will be of most benefit to the entire lamb-producing industry, should be given utmost consideration.

Market shows

The most important single criterion to use in selection of show lambs, especially for a market lamb show, is that of heavy, natural muscling. Lambs that will fatten but have a relatively small amount of lean or muscle tissue in their carcasses are of little value to the sheep industry. Evidence of abundant muscling can be seen in the rear quarters above the hock, on the outside of the rear leg, in the twist area, in the forearm area, and along the top line — particularly in the loin region.

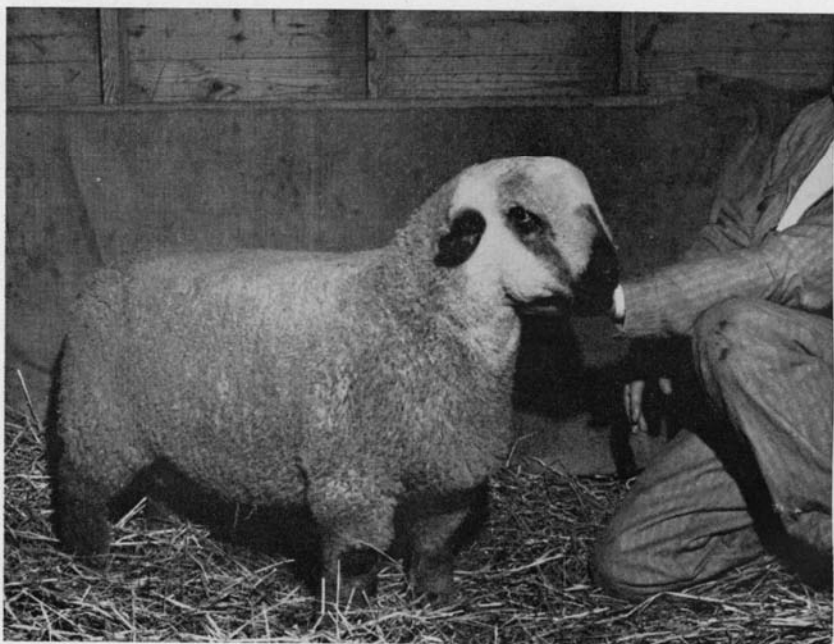


Bulging muscles in the leg and loin areas are good indications of desirable leanness in lamb carcasses.

Breeding classes

Lambs that are selected for breeding classes should be of sufficient size for their age, should have desirable head and ear characteristics, and should be acceptable in breed type with regard to length, density, and quality of fleece. The body conformation of lambs is extremely important because of its relation to the carcass value. Lambs to be exhibited should be straight and strong in their top; deep in fore and rear flanks; relatively long in the loin-rump area; heavily muscled throughout their body; and sound in their feet and legs, while standing on an abundant amount of bone.

Individuals that are constricted in the heart girth, narrow through the rib cage, weak in the top line, and extremely prominent in the backbone should not be shown. Lambs that are excessively long in the neck, those standing on extremely crooked legs, or long, weak pasterns, or those lacking cleanliness about the fleece will be poor advertising if exhibited.



Show lambs should be straight in their lines, of sufficient size for their age, wide, deep, and thick throughout their body, and with abundant muscling in the leg and loin areas.

Feeding the Show Lamb

Probably one of the most serious errors in feeding prospective show lambs is to feed at inconsistent and irregular hours. Sheep in general, and lambs in particular, are extremely sensitive to changes in the feeding routine. Lambs that are being fitted should be consistently fed at a definite hour each morning and evening. It is essential that lambs be gaining and "on feed" if they are to be their best at show time. Adequate exercise each day is important for the health, proper conditioning, and development of lambs. Changes in environmental conditions and sudden changes in temperature are likely to alter their feeding habits.

Lamb management

Many competent judges will discriminate against over-fitted or extremely fat lambs. Individuals should be firm, not over-fat or soft in their fleshing and condition. Excessive finish will inhibit the normal growth of lambs, but most important of all, their future usefulness as breeding stock will be impaired. Lambs that are being prepared for the show ring should be fed in drylot during the final two weeks before the show. The ration should be both bulky and laxative to prevent constipation. Lambs on a full feed should consume approximately equal amounts of top-quality legume hay and concentrates on a weight basis.

The grain content of the ration can be adjusted to meet the needs of a particular lamb or group of lambs. In general, oats are basically a feed that promotes growth; barley is usually considered to cause a firm finish; and corn normally produces rapid fattening. When more rapid gains are desired, the grain portion of the ration should be increased instead of raising the protein level. During intense summer heat, barley and oats rather than corn should be used as principal energy feeds.

Fitting rations

The following rations may be used in the lamb-feeding program to maintain and improve condition:

Maintain condition

Crushed oats	40%		Crushed oats	60%
Crimped barley	40%	or	Wheat bran	30%
Wheat bran	15%		Dry molasses	5%
Linseed meal	5%		Linseed meal	5%
		or		
			Cracked corn	30%
			Crushed oats	30%
			Wheat bran	30%
			Linseed meal	10%

Improve condition

Cracked corn	30%		Cracked corn	50%
Crushed oats	20%		Crimped barley	25%
Crimped barley	30%	or	Wheat bran	10%
Wheat bran	10%		Dry molasses	5%
Linseed meal	10%		Linseed meal	10%
		or		
			Cracked corn	25%
			Crushed oats	10%
			Crimped barley	50%
			Wheat bran	5%
			Linseed meal	10%

To each of the above rations add alfalfa hay at the rate of 1 to 2 pounds per lamb daily, or in amounts equal to the concentrate ration.

As the date of the show approaches, it is increasingly important to keep lambs eating regularly. Lambs should be transported to the sale, fair, or show during the cooler hours of summer evenings. The move should be made at least two days before the show date so that lambs may rest after transit. Lambs that have not been fed or watered the evening before shipment will stand the trip better, adjust to new surroundings more easily, and drink strange water sooner than lambs that are full when transported. A light feed on the evening before the exhibit will usually insure adequate feed intake and a desirable fill on the morning of the sale or show.

Preparing the Lamb for Exhibit

The object of preparing sheep for exhibit, as in other forms of merchandising, is to accentuate the strong points and minimize the weak points. The amateur sheep raiser should be familiar with the characteristics of the ideal meat-type lamb and know the characteristics of the breed with which he is working. To achieve this knowledge, he can study ideal animals on foot, carcasses in meat coolers, and pictures of desirable meat-type lambs in order to implant characteristics firmly in his mind.

A skillful shepherd is able to improve the appearance of his sheep whether he is presenting them with a 1/2-inch, a 1 1/2-inch, or a 2 1/2-inch fleece. Regardless of whether the showman is preparing a long-wool breed, a fine-wool breed, or one of the more popular medium-wool breeds of sheep, the art of trimming will be of great value in the show or sale ring.



Shaping lambs with an electric shears can substantially reduce the labor involved in trimming for show or sale.

The appearance of sheep can be improved with a minimum amount of trimming around the head, along the back or top line, in the area around the rear quarters, on the legs, and in the flank areas. When an electric "Shear-master" is used six to eight weeks in advance of the show, the time and effort required for trimming are greatly reduced.

The basic steps in the preparation of lambs for show or sale consist first of cleaning the fleece and then trimming small portions of wool in prescribed areas. These steps are relatively simple but necessary for the best appearance of all medium-wool breeds of sheep. The fleece of fine-wool breeds is usually not cleaned as thoroughly as the medium wools, but trimming is beneficial to them also. Trimming individuals of the long-wool breeds is usually limited to the dock, head, and flank areas. When sheep are shown in the shorn state, a limited amount of trimming in the head and dock area will improve their appearance.

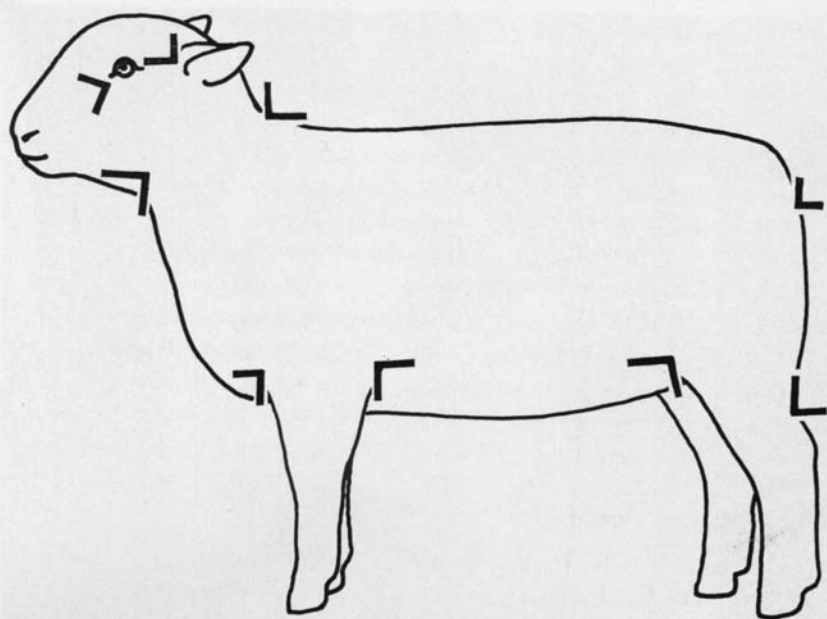
Cleaning the fleece

The fleece of all mutton-type breeds should be cleaned before being trimmed. Lambs that have been backed-down for at least 30 to 40 days may possibly be cleansed by shutting them in an open lot during a warm summer rainstorm. Ideally, lambs should be washed in a large tank with mild soap and warm water. A water hose with an attached nozzle can be used to remove the dirt from the tips of fleeces which are not excessively dirty. In all cases where soap is used, a thorough rinsing is required to remove soap particles from the wool. The flanks, dock, brisket, and chin usually require the most thorough washing.

The washing process should be completed at least three weeks before showing in order to allow the natural yolk to return to the fleece. When lambs have been thoroughly cleansed, the wool should be allowed to dry while the sheep are penned on a clean, well-bedded area. After lambs have been washed, allowed to dry, and then trimmed, a clean blanket should be provided to prevent dust and other dirt particles from settling on the outer edges of the clean wool fibers.

Trimming the lamb

Trimming the fleece of lambs basically involves following the natural body curvature, straightening individual wool fibers which may be bent or pushed down into the fleece, and smoothly cutting off tips of the fibers. It is also desirable to trim the head and dock regions in an accepted pattern.



Desirable characteristics of sheep can be accentuated by trimming these definite angles in the fleece.

Equipment. Much of the equipment that is used in trimming lambs is quite common on many livestock farms. Care of trimming equipment is extremely important, and all equipment should be cleaned thoroughly after each use. The most delicate piece of equipment is the trimming shears which should be cleaned, dried, and coated with a film of thin oil after using. For a satisfactory job of trimming, the following equipment is normally required:

Trimming table — which holds sheep immobile while trimming.

Water bucket — for soap, water, and dipping solution.

Pruning shears — for trimming feet.

Stiff brush — for brushing damp fleece.

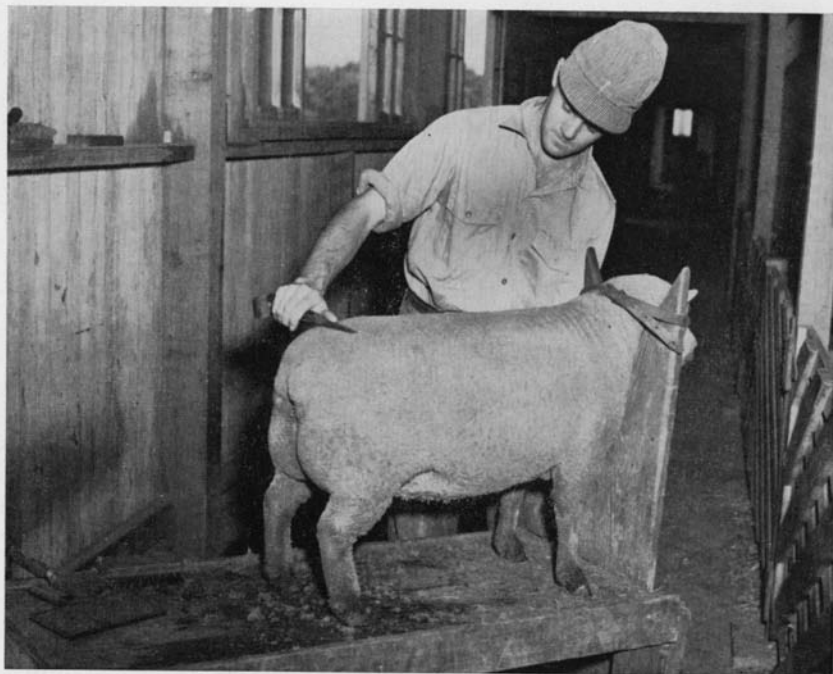
Circular curry comb — for raking and cleaning fleece.

Sponge or woolen rag — for rubbing wool fibers clean.

Wool cards — for raking and straightening out wool fibers.

Trimming shears — for clipping ends of wool fibers.

Trimming procedure. The art of trimming is developed only with practice. It is usually necessary to trim lambs more than once to



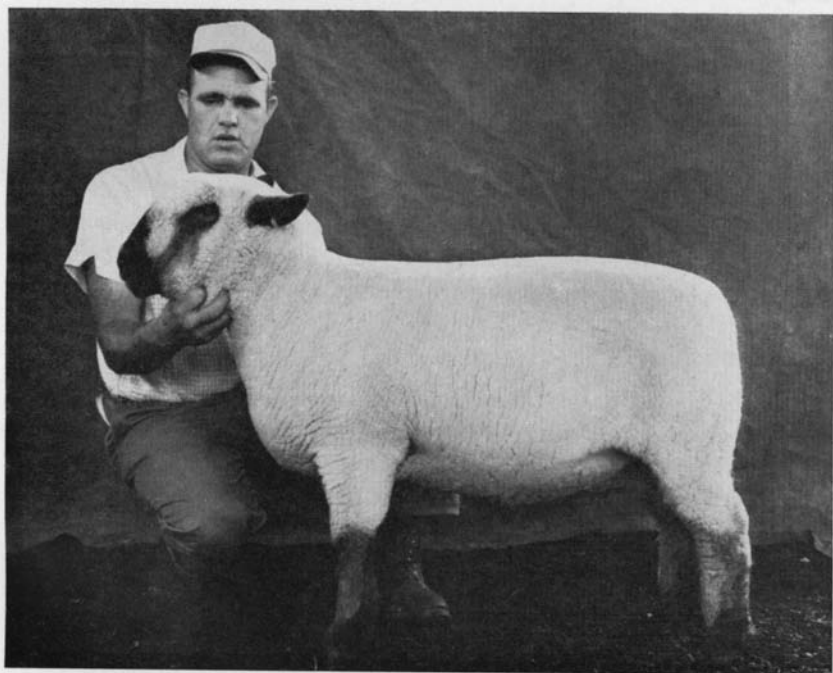
Basic but inexpensive equipment is normally required when preparing lambs for exhibition.

assure an especially smooth job. Only a small amount of wool should be removed at any one time. It is most desirable for the final trimming to occur the day before the show or sale. This will allow the trimmed fleece to set up or harden and present a more desirable appearance. A suggested trimming procedure is given below:

1. Place the lamb on a trimming stand and buckle a strap around its neck. Mature sheep can either be lifted onto the trimming stand or led up a small ramp so they can walk onto the table.
2. Lift up each foot gently and trim the hoof walls level with the sole of the foot, if this is needed.
3. Rake the wool over the entire body of the sheep with a dry brush. Then use a circular curry comb to remove dirt particles on the ends of fibers.
4. Dampen the fleece slightly by dipping the brush in a water pail and brushing the entire fleece briskly. A mild solution of an acceptable dipping compound will aid in cleaning and straighten-

ing the wool fibers. Dense, tight fleeces can withstand a greater concentration of water than coarse, loose wool.

5. Rake the entire fleece with a circular comb or a straight-tooth wool card to remove dirt from the outer ends of the wool fiber.
6. Card each fiber so that it is perpendicular to the skin. Do this with a bent-tooth wool card to break up the matted fibers.
7. Trim off the rough carded wool tips until a smooth surface is obtained. This may involve re-dampening the fleece, re-carding with the bent-tooth wool card, and trimming a second time.
8. Flatten the back of the sheep to at least its natural width, and always keep the points of the trimming shears pointed toward the outside.
9. Trim the sides of the lamb with the points of the shears turned up, and follow the natural curvature of the body.
10. Trim the wool on the rear legs and the twist area. Square up the dock. Trim off a minimum amount of wool with an upward motion.



Lambs which have been washed and properly trimmed will make a desirable presentation.

11. Trim with a downward motion under the chin, going down the brisket, and around over the shoulders.
12. Trim the head and neck area according to the respective breed type of the lamb. After trimming is completed pat the fleece over the entire body with the back of a dampened wool card.
13. Place a clean blanket on the sheep until shown or until the next time the lamb is trimmed.

Exhibiting Lambs

Every effort should be made to assure the best presentation of the lamb in the show ring. Lambs should be trained to look natural with their head held up and nose pointed down, with the feet well apart and set up squarely on the corners of the body. The back should be well braced without support. The ease with which the showman can hold or move his lamb is quite important, particularly in large sheep shows.

Preparation

Training on the part of both the lamb and the exhibitor will result in an improved performance in the show ring. Lambs should be trained to lead as well as to stand correctly during the final month before their exhibition. Mock shows during which a limited number of strangers handle the lambs will help develop their docility, and help accustom them to movement under show-ring conditions. It is imperative that the exhibitor hold the lamb firmly by grasping the wool and loose skin under the chin with one hand. When leading lambs, the second hand should be placed on the dock to facilitate movement in any direction.

Showmanship

Lambs should be placed between the showman and the judge, but apart from other individuals of the class so all lambs can be seen. The showman should always be alert to follow any directions which the judge may give. He should also develop an easy manner of handling the lamb. This will give the appearance of competence and yet does not excite the animal. Good sportsmanship is admired by everyone, and contestants should be capable of becoming either courteous losers or gracious winners.