

Selecting a Show Lamb

To select the right lamb, start by answering the following questions:

- What is your goal?
- Do you plan to participate at the county, state, or national level?
- How well do you aim to do at that level?

Next, determine the date of your target show. When does your lamb need to be in optimal condition and appearance? Then consider:

- What breed of lamb do I want to exhibit?
- Where am I going to get it?
- What are the ownership requirements for the exhibitions?

Most shows require you to own your project animal by a certain deadline, typically a few months before the show. You can find this information in the show rules and regulations.

If you lack experience or are unsure of how to select the right lamb, ask someone who has expertise for help. Agriculture teachers, FFA advisors, 4-H leaders, extension agents, and breeders are willing to help you find the right animal for your project.

It is important to find a lamb of the appropriate age and weight. Avoid choosing a project animal that is too old or one difficult to maintain at the correct weight, while finding an animal that's large enough to meet the minimum weight requirement for most shows. An important consideration in selecting a lamb is maturity, or the point at which your lamb will reach optimal condition or peak lean muscle-

to-fat ratio, or finished weight. Some lambs mature later than others, meaning they will need to be fed to heavier weights (140-160 lbs) to reach the optimal muscle-to-fat ratio. Later-maturing lambs are usually longer through their head (nose to poll), neck, body, and cannon bone while having less fat over the fore rib. Other lambs mature earlier and will be finished (or reach optimal fat levels) at lighter weights (120-130 lbs). Earlier-maturing lambs are usually shorter about their head (nose to poll), body, and cannon bone and often already have more fat deposition over the fore-rib, even at a younger age.

Parts of a Sheep

While it may seem elementary to some, it is important that you understand the parts of a sheep before learning about selection. Figure 1 shows the primary parts of a market lamb.

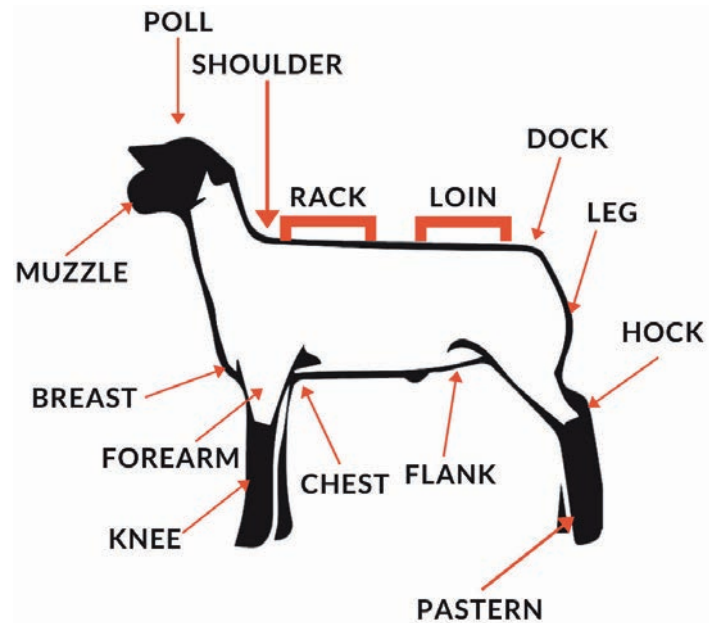


Figure 1. The primary parts of a market lamb.

Show Date	Ideal Age
July-August (when most Kansas county fairs take place).	Lambs born in January or early February work best.
September-November (when Kansas State Fair, Kansas Junior Livestock Show, and most national livestock shows take place).	Lambs born in February to early March are ideal.

Selection Criteria

When selecting a project animal, paying attention to the following will help you identify the ideal show lamb: muscle, leanness, structural correctness, balance, pattern, and growth.

Muscle

Muscularity stems from a wide base. Look for width through the chest floor, width of base from hock to ground. Muscle in market lambs is evaluated down their top and from behind (Figure 2).

- Shape of rack, width/squareness of loin, width of pins, shape/width to lower leg
- Market lambs are handled by the judge, so freshness and handling quality of the muscle is important, for example:
- Hard, square and upstanding shape to rack muscle
- Length of hind saddle (measured from the last rib back)
- Wide, square loin edge
- Firm, bulging shape to leg and depth to the twist
- Thin, fresh touch to the hide

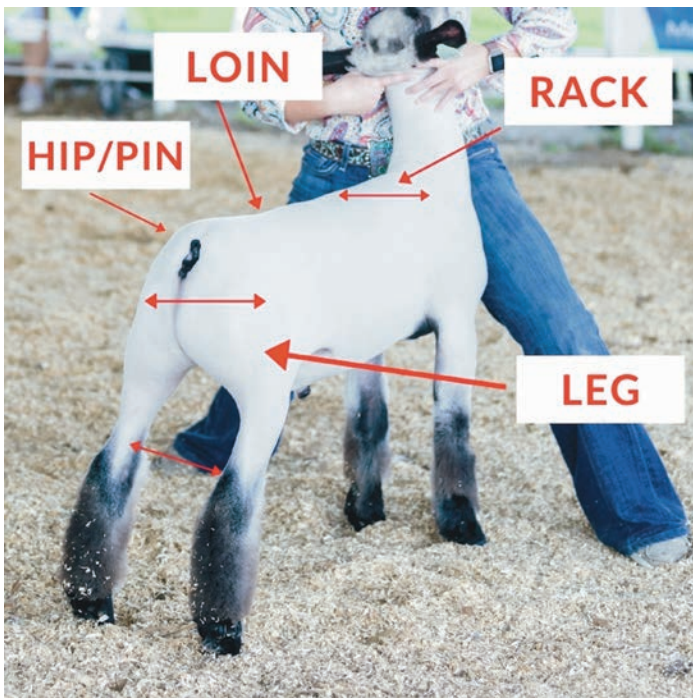


Figure 2. Muscle is evaluated down the top and from behind, noting the width and shape of the areas shown.

Leanness

Young lambs should appear lean over the forerib so they can mature into the correct degree of cover at their market weight. Judges evaluate finish in market lambs by the amount of fat cover laid over the forerib (Figure 3). Ideal fat cover for market lambs depends on their weight. You can also evaluate fat cover by looking for indentation from the lamb's shoulder into its forerib. [Learn more about market lamb carcass evaluation.](https://workspaces.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/4b/Animals/GBJ09.pdf) (<https://workspaces.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/4b/Animals/GBJ09.pdf>)

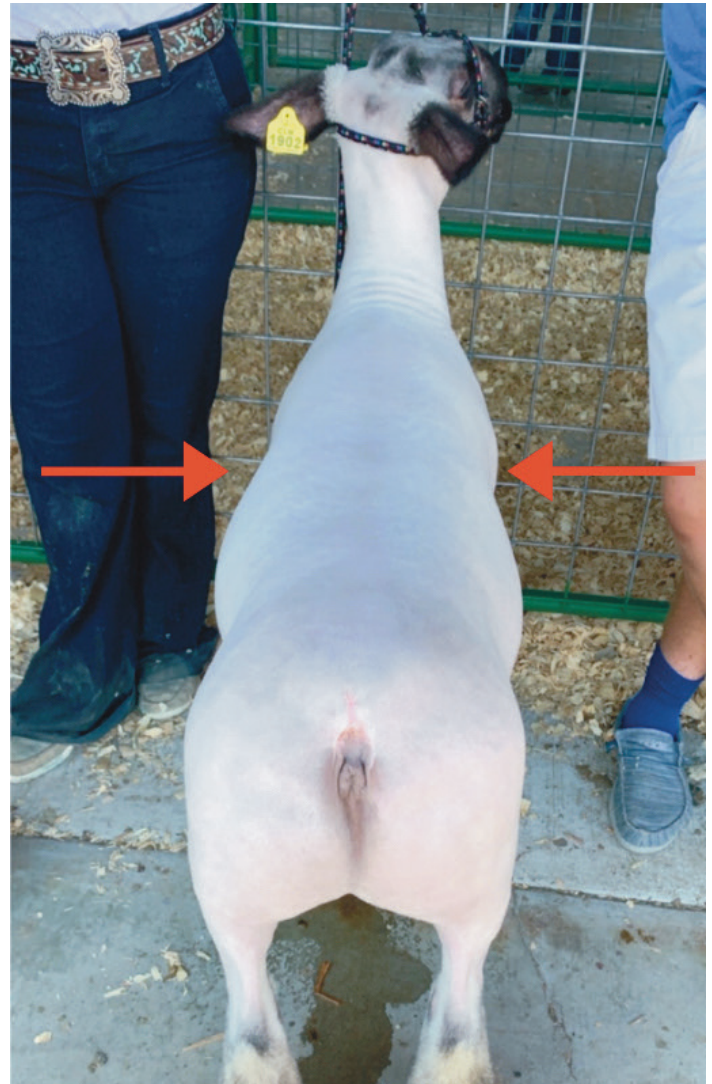


Figure 3. The indentation between the lamb's shoulder into its forerib indicates the amount of fat cover.

Structural Correctness

Structural correctness refers to how the lamb's skeleton is put together. Evaluate structure from the ground up, front to rear, and in motion. The lamb should carry its head high naturally. The neck should project high out of the shoulder. The shoulder blade should have an angle similar to 45 degrees. The knee should have an angle to it with a correct angle to the pastern. Front feet should plant wide and point straight ahead, feet should be big with toes that are even in size. The spine should be level all the way through the lamb's hip/dock. The hind leg should have some angularity from the side with a correct set to the pastern (Figure 4). From behind, the hind leg should plant wide and square from the hock to the ground.

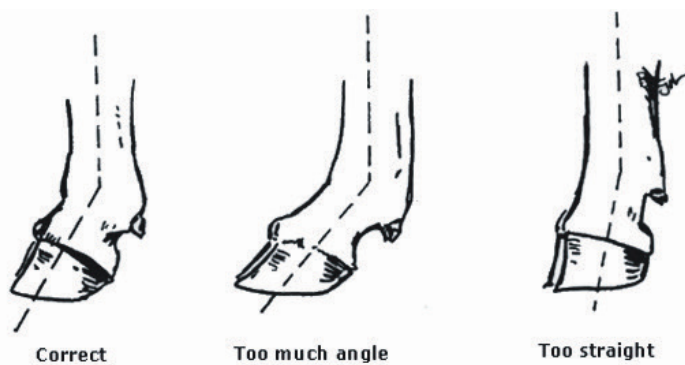


Figure 4. Correct pastern set. Source: New South Wales, Australia, Department of Primary Industries



Figure 5. The judge looks for a deepening of the chest from the base (circled) in front to the flank or hip region.

Balance

Balance is NOT the same thing as attractiveness. Balance means directly proportional. The lamb's length in the front, body, and hindquarter should all match. Lambs should be clean through the base of the chest (Figure 5) and become progressively deeper back to the flank.

The foot/bone should match the amount of muscle and mass the animal possesses. An extremely heavy muscled lamb with small feet and thin/frail bone is not balanced. The same is true of a lightly muscled lamb with big feet and stout bone.

Pattern

Pattern is the term used to describe attractiveness. An attractive lamb conforms to the following pattern as shown in Figure 6.

- Tall at the top of the shoulder
- Projects a long neck out of its shoulder
- Stays smooth down its topline and is smooth from the last rib, into the loin, and back to the hip, and
- Stays level and smooth down its top when set in motion.



Figure 6. A long neck projecting from the lamb's shoulder is desirable.

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MF3524 March 2021