

Show Lamb Care and Management

Facilities

While it is not necessary to have the newest and most expensive facilities, it is important to provide basic shelter and an optimal environment to ensure your lamb's success. Consider the following when evaluating management and housing options for your lamb:

- Make sure dry, clean bedding is provided.
- Lambs can be penned individually or with others, but a minimum of 20 square feet of floor space per lamb is recommended.
- Fences should be at least 42 inches tall. Use panels with vertical rather than horizontal bars to prevent injury to your lamb.

Provide a comfortable area for your lamb. It can be chilly during the day and cold at night when you bring your lamb home in the spring. Be prepared to provide a warm, draft-free area and a correctly mounted heat lamp if necessary. During the hot summer months, lambs not kept cool may decrease their feed intake. Always provide fresh, cool water and shade, and use fans if necessary.

Hang feeders at shoulder height for each lamb if penned individually. If penned as a group, set up individual feeding stalls to monitor the intake of each lamb. A variety of waterers can be used, but fresh water should be consistently available. If hand watering, use buckets no larger than 5 gallons and change the water at least once a day. During the summer, check watering buckets, keeping them full throughout the day, or use automatic waterers for convenience.

Health

Good health is the key to your lamb's success and is strongly linked with nutrition. A healthy lamb gains better and has an easier time reaching its target weight. A large portion of maintaining a healthy lamb involves preventive measures. Evaluate lamb health *daily*, looking for signs of illness as indicated by ear position, coughing, not eating or drinking, lethargy,

body temperature, and changes in stool. Administer proper medications under the direction of your veterinarian when needed, staying mindful of withdrawal times. Develop a good working relationship with your veterinarian to ensure the health of your animal.

Enterotoxemia – Caused by a clostridial organism normally found in the intestine of most sheep, also known as overeating disease. When lambs experience rapid changes in diet, such as consuming large amounts of grain, the organism grows and produces toxins that may result in death. Proper vaccination and gradual changes to the feeding program can help prevent this disease.

Internal parasites – It is recommended that you deworm only when needed. Often, parasite problems are confirmed by a fecal test performed by a veterinarian. Once a problem is confirmed, follow-up deworming is only necessary if there is continued infection. Learn more about deworming protocols from the [American Consortium for Small Ruminant Parasite Control](https://www.wormx.info/bmps) (<https://www.wormx.info/bmps>).

Coccidiosis – One of the most common internal parasites affecting show lambs is coccidia, a protozoan that reproduces in the intestinal cells. This problem is often characterized by diarrhea that may contain mucus and blood. Your veterinarian can help diagnose and develop a treatment plan. Many cases can be treated with medications such as Corid or Lasalocid.

Soremouth – This contagious disease causes scabs to form around the mouth and lips. This viral infection is transmittable to humans, so it is important to wear proper protection when handling lambs with soremouth. The application of iodine is common practice to dry out the scabs and speed the healing process.

Show lamb fungus – While more scientific terms may be used for this common skin issue, it is probably the most prevalent health issue you will face throughout the show season. This fungal infection, also known as ringworm, is highly contagious to both livestock and humans. Red lesions typically appear on the head,

neck, and back and eventually become crusty or scaly and circular. While there is no specific treatment, the following practices help keep lambs free of fungus.

- Wash your lamb with an antifungal shampoo immediately after a show and before you get home.
- Keep facilities and equipment clean and disinfect frequently.
- Isolate infected lambs from healthy lambs and clean equipment before use on other animals.
- Wear proper protection when handling infected animals to keep from passing it to healthy sheep or even yourself.
- Keep a close eye on your lamb's hide in the days following a show to see if lesions start to appear.

Halter Breaking

Halter breaking your lamb is a process. Do not get in a rush to start training as soon as you return home with your lamb. Allow a week of down time to start the lamb on feed and get it used to new surroundings. The lamb must be trained to walk on a halter before starting exercise. Begin by tying your lamb to a fence with enough slack to be comfortable. Your lamb is likely to fight this hard. It is critical that you stay with your lamb so it does not injure itself. Once the lamb stops fighting the halter, release it. Repeat this step daily until your lamb is comfortable being tied.

Once the lamb has been broken to tie, you are ready to teach it to lead. Again, this is a process. Rather than pulling on the halter to drag the lamb, stand to the side or behind your lamb and let it walk naturally. If

you pull the halter, the lamb will pull back and training will not progress.

Exercise

Exercise is critical at all stages of a lamb's life. Proper exercise during the early stage of the feeding program helps with muscle development and deposition, while exercise during the later stages maintains proper condition. Exercise adjustments should be made gradually. Avoid overworking the lamb, which can cause more harm than good. There are many ways to exercise your lamb, and knowing how and when to adjust your exercise program are critical your success.

Walking on a treadmill is a popular form of exercise for show lambs. You can use a standard treadmill and build a box around it to keep the lamb's feet from falling off the platform, or purchase a treadmill built specifically for lambs. While not essential, this method of exercise allows you to walk your lamb backwards, which activates muscles that normally would not get worked and offers greater efficiency. A track offers another option for exercising your lamb. This is a circular or oval-shaped pen built with tall panels that lambs can run around with the help of a professionally trained track dog. The panels should be at least 42 inches tall and free of sharp objects or points.

While both of these exercise methods are effective, they are not essential. You can exercise your lamb by walking or running it on a halter. You can walk your lamb long distances or sprint shorter distances. One common practice is to walk your lamb away from the barn and chase it back to its pen.

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