



## Tips for Beginning a Livestock Project: Market Lambs

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### Introduction

The 4-H junior livestock program develops life skills in thousands of youth across Utah. Youth gain confidence and responsibility as they feed and care for quality animals in preparation for exhibition and marketing of their project. Unfortunately for some youth, raising livestock becomes a disappointing experience when their project is sifted for being too light, performs poorly or is discounted by the judge. All too often an exhibitor unknowingly makes a wrong decision(s). Perhaps, at the beginning of the

project, a youth selects too small of an animal which physically cannot gain the required pounds for entry into the show or the youth chooses to feed a cheaper, nutritionally imbalanced feed. Through simple planning and following a few basic tips, a potential negative experience could turn into a positive life changing experience and build the 4-H livestock program across Utah. In general, a lamb that is 6 to 8 months old and weighs close to 140 lbs is the ideal market lamb.

Days Before Show	120	90	60	30	0
Weight	50 lbs	65-75lbs	80-100 lbs	95-125 lbs	110-150 lbs
Expected Gain	0.5-0.8 lbs/day	0.5-0.8 lbs/day	0.6-0.8 lbs/day	0.6-1.0 lbs/day	-
Amount to feed each day (percent of body weight)	2.5-3.0%	2.5-3.0%	3-4%	3-4%	3-4%
Quality of feed (CP %/TDN %)	18-20% / 73 -78%	18-20% / 73 -78%	16-18% / 73 -78%	16-18% / 73 -78%	14-18% / 73 -78%

### Factors Causing Poor Weight Gains in Market Lamb Project.

**Exposure to the elements.** High or low temperatures can cause market lambs to go off feed reducing weight gains. Environmental management tools, such as shades and fans should be considered if temperatures become excessive. Clipping lambs also keeps them cool, on feed, and growing well.

**Feed that is not nutritionally balanced.** If the crude protein levels (CP), total digestible nutrients (TDN), or minerals are too low or imbalanced the lamb will not perform to its genetic potential. Roughage in these rations should be good quality alfalfa or alfalfa-grass mix. A proper ratio of calcium to phosphorous (at least 2:1) in a lamb's diets is important to prevent urinary calculi. Roughages have high levels of calcium and low levels of phosphorus, while many protein supplements and

most grains are low in calcium and moderate to high in phosphorus. Therefore, caution must be used when formulating show lamb diets with little or no roughage.

***Inconsistent feeding/watering or sudden changes in feeds.*** Consistent feeding is important. Pick a set time, morning and evening, and stick with it. Only vary feeding times by 30 minutes. As with all ruminant livestock, lambs require transition diets when introducing a new ration in order to ensure rumen health. If the diet is changed quickly, acidosis will result. Allow 3 to 7 days over which the new diet is blended into the previous one at increasing rates.

***Diseases and illness.*** Prior to purchasing a lamb, ensure that it has been given the appropriate vaccinations. The most important one is type C and D enterotoxaemia (over eating disease) which causes sudden death in lambs. To prevent parasites lambs should be wormed once a month. Follow the label when administering vaccinations, antibiotics or wormers.

***Water.*** Lambs should have fresh water and trace mineralized salt with selenium available at all times. Water is essential for good health and muscle development (muscle is 75% water). Never withhold water from a lamb to limit weight gain. Five to seven days prior to the fair, water the lamb in the water bucket that will be used at the fair. If the animal will be drinking chlorinated water at the fair, add an approved sheep electrolyte to the water to mask the odor and taste.



## References

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