

Utah State University Extension 4-H JR. LIVESTOCK FACT SHEET

First-Time Market Lamb



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Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to join one of the most hands-on 4-H activities out there! This fact sheet is designed for first-time lamb projects to help prepare and guide you through the basic steps of your 4-H livestock project.

Preparation



Registering for 4-H

Contact your local Utah State University Extension 4-H office to find out how to join a 4-H club and where to register for 4-H.

Reading the Rules

Determine where you plan to show your animal and read the rules and requirements for your project, including information like:

- Tagging dates.
- Ownership length requirements.
- Minimum and maximum weights.
- Show dates, check-in dates, and weigh days.
- Rules related to the specific show.

Finding a Mentor

Find a mentor who has shown lambs before to help guide you through the process. This can be an older 4-H or Future Farmers of America (FFA) member, a leader, or a community member that has shown in the past.

Developing a Budget for Common Expenses

It is important to understand where and how your money is working for you when it comes to raising 4-H project animals. Tracking your expenses and incomes will help you decide future management decisions like selection, housing, supplements, feed, and transportation. Some common areas to consider include the following.

- **Purchase amount:** Shop around and see what show lambs in the area are selling for. Lamb prices vary widely depending on quality, breeder, breed etc. The important part of budgeting is having an amount in mind that you can afford and then shopping around for animals that fit in that price range.
- **Housing:** Animals should be penned in areas with proper footing, ventilation, shade, and free from any objects that may cause harm. Additionally, build pens with materials that will keep your project animals in and predators out.
- **Water:** All show animals need access to fresh water. This is the key factor in raising a show lamb. Keep water buckets in the shade and clean them out regularly.
- **Feed:** Consult with your local feed store or 4-H group leader to learn more about lamb nutrition. As a rule, growing show lambs should eat approximately 4% of their body weight per day. As animals mature and growth slows down, that will decrease to 3% per day. They should also have access to a high-quality hay source. Lambs are ruminants and require hay to get needed nutrients and keep their digestive system healthy.



- **Vet care:** While there usually are not many vet care expenses for a market animal, you should always budget several hundred dollars in case you must address an emergency. Talk to your breeder or vet to make sure all vaccinations and wormers are up-to-date.
- **Routine preventative care:** Remember you are raising an animal destined for food production, so there are withdrawal periods on medications that apply to your animal. Please read each label carefully and consult a veterinarian before any treatment.
- **Supplies:** To properly prepare and manage your animal for your desired show, consider the following must-haves.
 - *Clippers.* Lambs may need to be shorn several times throughout your project timeline. Purchasing a set of clippers and blades is highly recommended, especially as show day approaches and the demand for communal/group supplies increases. Owning your own set of clippers and blades ensures biosecurity and minimizes spreading disease.
 - *Cleaning shampoo/Conditioning treatment.* Washing and cleaning the lamb before clipping preserves the life and sharpness of your clippers and blades by removing debris and lanolin from the wool that may dull your blades. Once clipped, condition the animal regularly to maintain healthy skin and coat conditions.
 - *Halters.* Using a halter made specifically for lambs is a great tool to help train your animal how to walk and lead.
 - *Stand.* A stand secures the lamb's head to maintain control while grooming and prepping animals for show.
 - *Blankets and leg wraps (optional).* While these items are not necessary to raise a 4-H market lamb, they do provide added benefits and protection.



Select an Animal

Finding a Breeder

Contact a reputable breeder in your area. Ask kids in the community who have shown before where they get their animals and what they look for in a breeder. Most breeders are willing to help with a feed program and progress reports throughout your project. There are also many online sale sources. Join local livestock social media pages to find more options.

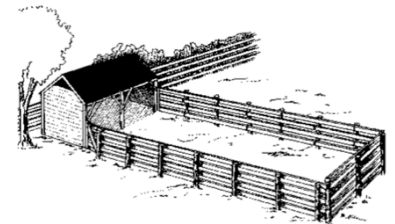
Choosing the Right Size

Select an animal that will be the right size for your county fair. You will want your lamb to be between 6–10 months of age when you show it and average 110–140 pounds. You will usually select your animal at around 8 weeks of age, and it should weigh around 50 pounds. Check your local rules to ensure you know the minimum weight requirement for fair weigh-in.

Bring Your Animal Home

Housing

- Have a safe and secure pen set up, including clean water and feed. Make sure it has shelter from the sun, wind, and rain.
- Using shavings or straw in the pen helps keep your lamb comfortable and clean. Pens should be cleaned daily.



- A smaller pen makes it easier to catch your lamb when starting to work with it. Working with your lamb as early as possible sets you up for more success.

Feeding and Gaining Weight

- Try to find out what the breeder has been feeding your animal, purchase the same food, or get a small quantity from the breeder to make a gradual shift to a food of your choice.
- Check with your local feed companies to see what food they have for your species of animal and how fresh and frequently they get it in stock.
- Do not mix feed across species; some feeds can be toxic to other species.
- Pick a feed and stick with it! It can cause stomach upset if you are constantly switching feed. It can also decrease weight gain.
- A newly weaned lamb should be on a creep feed or free choice until they reach about 70–80 pounds.
- Once lambs grow to 70–80 pounds, you can switch them to a weighed feed regimen.
- For increased weight gain, feed 3.5% to 4% of the lamb's body weight in dry matter. To maintain weight, feed 3%.
- Split the feed quantity in half and feed one-half twice a day.
- Regularly weigh your animal and adjust feed as needed.
- Check with your local FFA chapter; they usually have summer weigh days.
- At 100 pounds, your lamb can start an exercise program.
- Your lamb will need to be fed some hay along with their show grain every day. Hay can cause what looks like a more bloated belly. Reducing the hay amount a of couple weeks before the fair can reduce that hay-belly look. Remember to consider hay as part of the 3.5% to 4% of their body weight.

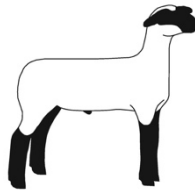


Training

- Start halter-breaking your animal a few days after you bring it home (once it has settled in).
- Put the halter on your lamb and tie it somewhere it cannot climb or get tangled, and let it get used to being tied up. Stay close in case it gets itself into trouble.
- Teach your lamb to walk while wearing a halter. Having another person to walk behind the lamb helps encourage it to walk.
- Once your lamb knows how to walk, start teaching it how to brace. A brace is a forward-pushing motion from your lamb that engages all its muscles.
- Start teaching your lamb to tolerate you moving and adjusting its legs into a proper show stance.
- Once it can lead and brace, take the halter off and start hand-walking your lamb like you will on show day. Start in a small, enclosed area in case your animal gets away.
- A finished lamb can hand-walk and then stand and brace without moving for 3–5 minutes at a time.
- Repetition and patience are the keys to success with training lambs.

Managing Health

- Deworm your animal when you first bring it home. Follow your local veterinarian’s advice for frequency, dosage, and type of wormer to use.
- Common things to watch out for in sheep are ringworm, staphylococcal dermatitis (staph), sore mouth, and white muscle disease. When closer to finishing, prolapses can occur.
- Watch for any other abnormal health concerns and contact a veterinarian immediately if you observe any of the following:
 - Diarrhea.
 - Not eating or drinking.
 - Coughing.
 - Lameness.
 - Scabs or hair loss.
 - Nasal and eye discharge.



Grooming

- As mentioned above, your lamb will require shearing multiple times in the year. Lambs will grow better if they stay cool.
- Here are a few tips to help with a successful shearing:
 1. Start with a clean and dry lamb; make sure to remove the dirt from the belly and between the legs.
 2. When starting to shear, it is easiest to do on a stand.
 3. Keep blades sharp and clean on your clippers.
 4. Keep blades on clippers flat and close to the lamb’s body.
 5. Stretch skin with your free hand as you move the clippers down the body.
 6. Try to keep blade passes going lengthwise down the back.
 7. Do not cut off leg hair below the hock on front or back legs (this will be trimmed later).



Photo Credits

The cover page photo is courtesy of showman R. Hansen; the other photo is provided by Utah State University Extension.

References

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