Sheep Resource Handbook
for Market and Breeding Projects
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Guidelines for a 4-H Sheep Breeding or Market Lamb Project

1. Complete one or more of the following project books that correspond to the type of project you are taking annually:
   - Market Lamb Project and Record Book
   - Sheep Breeding Project and Record Book

2. Attend or complete a quality assurance program every year you enroll in a sheep project.

3. Secure project animals and keep in your continual care and possession.

4. Make sure your project entry form is completed and submitted to the county office on time.

5. Be sure to review the rules outlined in your county fair premium book if you plan on participating at the county fair. Regulations may vary from county to county.

Benefits to a 4-H member

1. Selection in judging. From the time you select your lamb to the time of showing, you will be learning what characteristics to look for in a modern market lamb or breeding sheep.

2. Record keeping. Part of the requirement for a market lamb or sheep breeding project is record keeping. By keeping records, you will learn costs of feed and equipment, profit and loss, and hopefully establish a bank account for your education or future business.

3. Nutrition. You will learn the nutritional requirements of sheep and how to balance a diet.

4. Health. Learning about sheep diseases and parasites and their control is part of your training in project lessons.

5. Quality assurance. Increase the awareness of the issues of animal well-being, quality assurance, and ethics.

6. Competition. You will benefit from learning to fit and show your project, and to win and lose graciously.

7. Ownership pride. Owning and caring for lambs gives you the feeling of pride and satisfaction.

8. Professional and social development. Having a market lamb/sheep breeding project will bring you into contact with successful sheep breeders and producers, project leaders, and other 4-H mentors.

9. Consumer awareness. Completing a livestock project will help you better understand how meat enters our food chain.

Opportunities of Lamb Projects

Sheep projects are excellent for 4-H members because lambs are trainable and young people can work with them easily. Advantages of sheep projects include:

1. Small initial investment.
2. Quick turnover of return.
3. Small space requirements.
4. Training in selection, feeding, management.
5. Possibility of expanding project into a profitable livestock enterprise.
6. Understanding of animal needs and welfare.
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Additional Learning Experiences

1. Be on a livestock judging team
2. Attend livestock project seminars.
3. Demonstrate fitting and showing.
4. Participate in a sheep skillathon.
5. Attend the State Fair.
6. Visit a sheep producer’s operation.
7. Visit a feed mill.
8. Visit a local veterinarian.
10. Visit a store to study the different ways sheep products are marketed.

Subjects for a 4-H Club Talk

- Why I chose a market lamb or sheep project.
- Why I chose a sheep breeding project.
- What I learned from my sheep project.
- How wool is used in our everyday lives.
- The importance of the sheep industry.
- Sheep diseases and prevention and treatment.
- How to prepare a sheep for show day.
- Animal well-being and care.
- Quality assurance and food safety.

Teamwork for the Common Goal

The purpose of all project work is to enhance the education, experience, and development of young people, a purpose that is not realized without the involvement of several people working as a team. The successful completion of a sheep project depends upon the combined efforts of parents, experts, 4-H leaders, and you. All have responsibilities.

To Parents

How much your child learns in their 4-H sheep project depends on the kind of support and encouragement you give. Much of your time will be spent helping your child obtain the resources needed to complete the project. You may offer other assistance when necessary, but you should never interfere with your child’s opportunity to learn by doing. Be available to listen to his or her needs and concerns, and offer praise whenever possible. Stress the value of doing one’s own work, and help your child realize how much he or she has learned from that work. To most children, a sense of accomplishment is usually more important than a ribbon or a trophy.

It is also inappropriate for a professional to own, care for, or groom the project animal. 4-H members should own their project animals and keep these animals under their care. Also keep in mind that most projects (especially those involving animals) will require several adjustments at home and some investments to be successful. For this project, separate pens, a shelter, and some room for exercise will be needed, as well as facilities for feeding the project animal and materials for keeping records. It may be necessary to purchase special feed supplements and special grooming and showing equipment.

Remember, your son’s or daughter’s success in this and all projects depends on a large extent on the encouragement, support, and involvement that only you can give.

To the 4-H Advisor

As people directly concerned with youth development, it is the responsibility of every 4-H advisor and agent to help each member who wants a sheep project (and has financing and suitable facilities) to secure one. Keep in mind that people like you, in such positions, have exceptional influence with youth, and your encouragement and help can not only lead to completed projects but contribute as well to the development of responsible citizens.

To the Member

After you have made the decision to take a sheep project, it is important that you know what type of animal you are looking for, how to feed it, diseases it may have, management practices, and many other important concepts.

By teaching you these matters through information and experience, this project will make it possible for you to produce a high-quality and safe product—in other words, lamb that the consumer wants to buy. To have a successful project you must be willing to study and review the information contained in this handbook and apply it.

The 4-H member project books contain activities that enhance learning from the information gained in this handbook.

History

Sheep originated in Asia 10,000–20,000 years ago. Scientists believe they looked like goats and had horns and coarse hair. Over several generations, the hair turned to wool.

For thousands of years, sheep have provided food and clothing for humans. Sometimes, they have been used as pack animals. In the past 200–300 years, they have become important providers of meat.

As new countries settled, sheep spread throughout the world. They are now raised in almost every country, with Australia and Mongolia being the leading sheep-producing countries.

Sheep were brought to North America by Spanish and English settlers. Columbus brought the animals to the New World on his second voyage in 1493. Sheep were shipped to Virginia from England in 1609. As people moved west across the United States, sheep went with them. Approximately 75 percent of the sheep in the United States are now west of the Mississippi River.

Sheep are found on many farms in Ohio. They can be a good source of income with two important products—wool and meat.
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Sheep are found on many farms in Ohio. They can be a good source of income with two important products—wool and meat.
Here are some terms used by producers when talking about sheep.

**Breed**—A group of sheep with similar characteristics (color markings, size, quality of fleece, etc.) that are passed on to their offspring.

**Breeder**—The owner of the parents of a lamb when they are mated.

**Castration**—Removal of the testicles. Castrating should be done before the lamb is two weeks old.

**Concentrate**—A feed that is high in nutrients and low in fibrous material. Examples are corn, oats, and soybean meal.

**Crossbred**—A sheep or lamb whose parents are of different breeds.

**Dipping**—Immersing the entire sheep in water containing an insecticide to kill ticks or lice.

**Docking**—The removal of the tail. Docking should be done when the lamb is only a few days old.

**Drenching**—Treating sheep for internal parasites with an oral dose of a deworming medicine.

**Ewe**—Female sheep of any age.

**Fleece**—The wool from one sheep. The wool in the fleece is supposed to cling together in one piece. The fleece from most sheep in Ohio will weigh seven to eight pounds.

**Flock**—A group of sheep that are managed together. Sheep have inborn ability or desire to flock, or gather, together. This is also known as gregariousness.

**Flushing**—The practice of conditioning ewes before breeding by turning them to better pasture or feeding small amounts of grain. Flushing is done to increase the number of twin and triplet lambs that will be born.

**Forage**—A feed that is high in fibrous material and somewhat low in energy. Examples are hay, pasture, and silage.

**Gestation**—The time from the date the ewe is mated with the ram until the lambs are born, usually 143 to 152 days.

**Grade**—A sheep that has only one purebred parent and one scrub parent.

**Incisors**—Front teeth.

**Incisor**—From teeth.

**Lamb**—A young sheep, either male or female under 1 year of age.

**Marbling**—The fat within the muscle.

**Meat type**—Breeds of sheep that are used primarily for the production of meat. These are the predominant breeds in Ohio.

**Mutton**—The meat from sheep older than 12 months of age.

**Parturition**—The process of giving birth.

**Polled**—Naturally hornless.

**Purebred**—An individual sheep whose parents are of the same breed. This animal could be eligible for registration by a breed association.

**Ram**—A male sheep of any age. Sometimes a ram may be called a buck.

**Scrub**—A sheep whose ancestry is so mixed that it does not resemble any particular breed or cross.

**Shearing**—Removing the wool from a sheep.

**Shepherd**—A person who cares for sheep.

**Shearing**—The process of giving birth.

**Shearing**—Removing the wool from a sheep.

**Shearing**—A person who cares for sheep.

**Shearing**—Trimming or shearing the wool away from the tail or dock area.

**Wether**—A male sheep that has been castrated at an early age.

**Yearling**—A male or female sheep between 1 and 2 years of age.

**Chapter 2 • Selection: The First Step**

**Ways to Start Your Project**

There are several ways to start your market lamb and/or sheep breeding project. One is to select a lamb or lambs from your parents' or your own ewe flock. Another is to purchase a market lamb or a breeding sheep from an established sheep producer in your county or area. Sheep producers provide many outstanding sheep each year for sale on the farm or through sheep sales.

**Selecting Your Lamb**

Selection of a project animal should be done carefully, with consideration given to breed, size, and quality. Size and quality are especially important, and while management and nutrition have great influence on both, it is a big help to begin with a good animal.

At the same time, however, while you want to select the best lambs you can possibly afford, be sure that the price you pay is consistent with your objectives. For the beginner, who is learning about feeding, management, etc., good quality lambs bought at a modest price may be the wisest investment. Purchasing livestock at high prices does not guarantee success nor mean easier management.

A successful project outcome requires the lamb to have a desirable genetic background and an excellent environment while in your care.

**How to be a good judge:**

- Study pictures of ideal animals.
- Select animals based on ideal you have studied.
- Review judging terminology.
- Learn the different parts of the live animal and carcass.
- Have a clearly defined "mental picture" of the ideal animal.
- Make a quick and accurate observation or decision.
- Be able to evaluate what you see.
- Be confident and honest.
- Be able to defend the decisions you made—think on your feet.