



# SHEEP

## Fitting and showing Guide



CANADA  
4-H Alberta

## **The 4-H Motto**

“Learn to Do by Doing”

## **The 4-H Pledge**

I pledge

My **Head** to clearer thinking,

My **Heart** to greater loyalty,

My **Hands** to larger service,

My **Health** to better living,

For my club, my community,

my country, and my world.

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Created 2016

# Fitting and Showing Your Lamb

## What do handlers mean when they talk about “fitting a lamb”?

Fitting includes all of the grooming and handling you do with your lamb before taking it to a show or a fair. You will need to train your lamb to stand for grooming so that you can wash, shear, and clip it, and trim its hooves.

How early should you start working with a lamb? You will need to let your lamb get used to you over the course of several weeks. At first, just visit the lamb a few times a day and work your way up to petting the lamb. Be gentle. After about two weeks of being near and petting the lamb, you can start to pat rather than pet, and get the lamb used to you running your hands up and down its legs and around its body .

You can introduce a halter to the lamb so that it gets used to wearing the halter and once it is familiar with a halter then you can start to teach it to being led around. Other aspects of training are described in the 4-H reference guides. This reference guide assumes that your lamb is already halter broken and that it will stand still and is willingly to be led.

### Lamb Terms

**Setting the Lamb Up:** When you take your lamb in front of a judge at the show or fair, the judge will expect the lamb to stand in a show position. This is called setting the lamb up.

**Bracing the Lamb:** Training your lamb to hold it’s back stiffly, or braced when it is asked to do so. Bracing helps keep the lamb’s back line straight, not humped up.

## What Equipment Do You Need?

A trimming stand is very useful but not absolutely necessary. If your lamb is used to being tied and standing still you can restrain the lamb in a halter. The lamb’s head should be held at the most desirable height or position for showing when you are doing the trimming.

A small tool box can be used as a tack box or bag to keep your equipment in. This keeps all tools in one place so that you can find them each time you work with your lamb. When you take your lamb to a fair or show grounds, your display area will look tidier because your tools will be contained in the box or bag. It is very important that you have all of your show equipment clean and ready prior to the day the show starts.

### Items for Your Tack Box or Bag

1. lamb halter
2. hoof trimmers (club may have one)
3. wool card
4. curry comb or wool rake
5. rags and scraps of cloth used to clean shears or dry the wool
6. brush
7. trimming shears
8. blanket (optional)
9. bucket
10. electric shears (optional)
11. whetstone (optional)



## Handling Your Lamb

Here are some easy steps to take to move your lamb, set it up, and brace it.



Leading you lamb

### Step 1 - Moving Your Lamb

To move the lamb, stand on its left side, grasp it under its chin with your left hand and put your right hand on its dock. Guide the lamb with your left hand and move it by pressing on its dock with your right hand. Never work your lamb for long periods of time or it will become restless and stubborn .

Note: Basic handling techniques are covered in our Beginner's Sheep Resource. This resource focuses on Showing and Trimming.



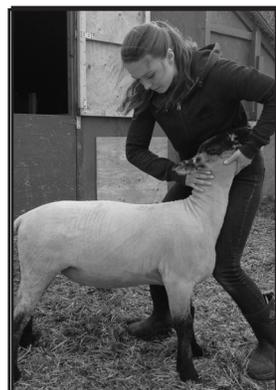
Setting a front leg

### Step 2 - Setting Your Lamb Up

In the show ring, the lamb should stand quietly with the front and hind legs set squarely under the four corners of the animal. The head should be held up. Always work on the side of the lamb opposite to the judge. In general, you will be working on the left side (from the rear of the lamb) of your lamb. Occasionally you will have to move your lamb on the right side. Set the lamb by moving its feet into proper position. Practice this often for short periods of time.



Setting a back leg



Bracing a lamb

### Step 3 - Bracing a Lamb

Bracing is a term that means having the lamb hold it's back rigid when someone presses on it. Stand in front of your lamb and cup its chin in your hands. Pull downward with your hands and apply enough backward pressure to cause the lamb to arch or bend its back. Do not choke the lamb or grasp so hard that you hurt the animal, remember you want this to be an experience that doesn't scare the lamb.

The show person should put their knee against the brisket (the breast) to prevent the lamb from bolting when the judge handles the lamb.

## Washing Your Lamb

Assemble all of your supplies in the washing area. Make sure there is proper drainage. You will use a hose to loosen and remove loose dirt from the lamb's fleece, legs and feet. If you have access to warm water, this will work best as it will help remove lanolin (the natural oil in wool) that can hold dirt particularly on the belly areas. . Start at the neck and gently work your way down the animal so the water runs down and drains away. Be careful to not get soap or water into the lamb's eyes or ears. Go slowly and let the lamb get used to the water.

Once it is all wet, use either livestock shampoo or mild dish soap like Sunlight or Dawn. Create a lather using your hands or a stiff brush, rubbing gently, but firmly in circular scrubbing motions. Pay special attention to the belly, under the legs and the crotch. Use a cloth to wash the lamb's face.



Rinse well using the hose. Soap left on the skin is irritating. Hold the end of the hose next to the skin and move in a circular scrubbing motion until the water runs clear. You may have to spot shampoo again, if the lamb still has dirty or stained areas after the first wash.

Once you are satisfied that your lamb is clean, remove excess moisture from the fleece with your hand or with a flat surface such as the back of a wool card. Dry the fleece with a terry cloth towel or carefully with a hair dryer or beef blower. Keep the hair dryer moving because it can burn the lamb's skin if held too long in one spot.

Keep the lamb in a clean, well-bedded pen filled with plenty of clean, dry bedding until show time. Cover the lamb with a blanket to keep the straw or shavings out of the fleece.

## Blanketing Your Lamb

Blanketing your lamb helps keep your lamb clean. It may also help to bring out the natural lanolin in the wool creating a "bloom" or gloss to the fleece. Before blanketing your lamb, always use a curry comb or brush to remove any surface dirt, hay, straw or shavings. A blanket can be made from a clean burlap sack or pillow case. Flannel fabric stays in place better than shiny, polished fabrics. Open the sack or pillow case down one side almost to the corner, leaving 15-25 cm fastened together at the corner to fit over the lamb's brisket; then open just enough of the end for the lamb's head and neck. Put the lamb's head through the hole in the bottom of the sack. A twine loop or cotton string around the rear legs will help hold the blanket in place. Check blankets often. Watch that the twine, or string, doesn't chaff or rub the skin.



## Carding Your Lamb

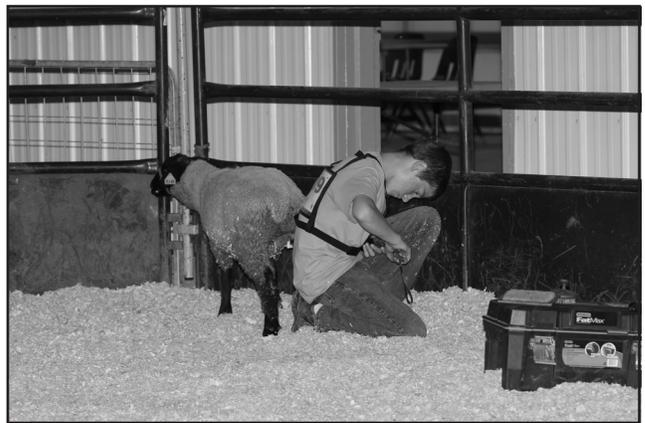
The card is a special tool used for straightening wool fibers for spinning, weaving as well as for fitting show lambs. On a show lamb the 'hooks' on the card are used to stand up the fibres so they can be trimmed evenly. To use a wool card hook your thumb around the handle of the card and place your fingers placed solidly along the back of it. Your fingers support and keep the card in position as you work it.

Catch the end of the wool fibres with the hooks on the card and lift gently. Do not catch the fibres too deeply as this makes for hard work and is painful for the lamb. You will need to practice finding the right depth to card to do a good job. Practice until you can card with a rolling motion of your hand and wrist. Set the heel of the card in the fleece first; then push the top side of the card into the fleece and bring the heel up and out of the fleece at the same time. Carding makes the fleece stand up so it is easier to trim with your shears. Go slowly at first until you get the feel of it. Never try to rake the card through the fleece.

When the card fills with wool, it should not be cleaned by pulling one card over the other. You can use a small rake which you can make by putting a ninety degree bend in the prongs of a discarded dinner fork.

## Grooming Your Lamb

Inspect the feet. Your lamb's feet should have flat soles with no excess hoof on the toe or sides. If hooves need trimming, trim at least two weeks prior to the show. Trim any overgrown areas slowly and carefully. Trim across the toe and then down each side. Be careful not to trim the toe too closely. If you leave hoof trimming until one or two days before the show and you happen to get the hooves too short, the lamb may be lame.



## Trimming Your Lamb

Once the wool (or fleece) has been carded, you will use your hand shears to clip small amounts and short lengths of fleece at a time. The procedure is described below. A shear cut that is too deep is very hard to smooth out or cover.

The purpose of trimming a lamb is to remove fleece over the entire body according to your show rules. Trimming is one way to help make your lamb's body look smooth and uniform. Fitting the lamb's fleece is done several different ways. Most market lambs are shorn very close to show their natural muscling. Know the grooming rules for your show. Some rules state that lambs must be slick shorn or that wool must be a certain length.



**Generally, you may slick shear the lamb at least a week before the show. After slick-shearing the lamb will need shelter from the sun, wind, rain and snow. If the lamb is not slick shorn trimming should be done carefully so the lamb's fleece is smooth. The final trimming or "touch-up" should be the day before or early the morning of the show (Figures 66 and 67). You should only need to card and trim off any rough edges or uneven areas on the day of the show.**

**Slick Shorn:** When a lamb is shorn so that the length of wool over its body is uniform and very close to the body (about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch). The purpose is to show off the conformation of the lamb, which you can clearly see when the fleece is completely shorn. Some judges even require the lambs to be shorn the day of the show to be "slick shorn."

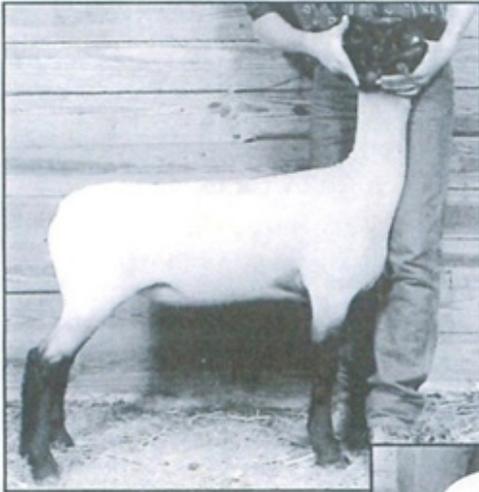


Figure 66 Slick shorn lamb shows natural muscling

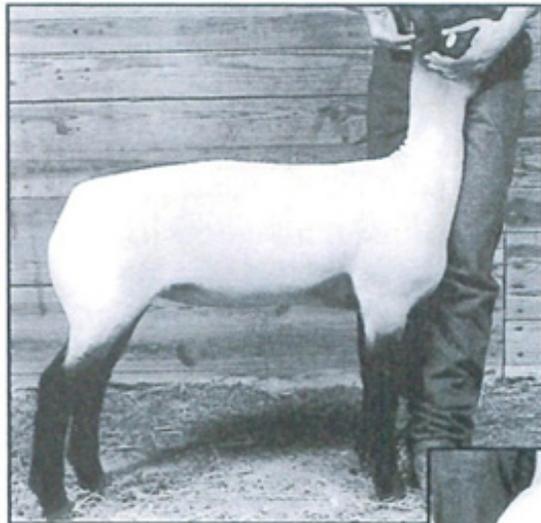


Figure 67 Lamb fitted to leave extra wool to emphasize hind quarter muscling



## Procedure For Trimming Your Lamb

- Use a curry comb or wool rake to drag through the fleece. This straightens the crimp and makes for a smoother look.
- Card the wool after dragging.
- Carding is most important. Always spend the majority of your time carding your animal, and the remainder of time on trimming.
- Starting on the top, trim off the tips of all carded wool using the shears in such a manner that a uniform, even cut is made.
- Place the shears flat on the surface to be trimmed and tilt slightly up.
- Move the shears forward so the bottom blade glides slowly and smoothly. Do not move your thumb when trimming.
- As the bottom blades move forward, clip the fleece by repeatedly pulling the top blade back to the bottom blade and releasing it.

## Fitting Safety Tip

When fitting a lamb, you are using many sharp tools. Hand shears need to be sharp and can be hazardous. Be careful not to injure yourself or any of the exposed areas of the animal. Particularly watch when trimming around the hocks, the belly, flank skin, the face, ears and the area under the dock.

## Extra Grooming Tips

The fitting or grooming should be done in a manner which displays the natural contour of the body when viewed from the rear. The wool is rounded over the rump to the dock and down each side to blend with the leg. Trim outward on the leg to blend with the side and over the rump. Flatness and squareness is associated with overly fat lambs, so avoid this shape.

Sufficient wool should be trimmed off the leg to make it handle easily and look good. The thigh region should be the widest on a structurally correct, well-muscled lamb. Trim the sides smooth and blend the top and sides while following the natural contour of the forelegs.

Use shears or scissors to carefully trim the wool from around the eyes and blend the trimmed fleece with the jaw and neck. Have an adult help you with this step if you are uncertain about what to do. Roll and blend the neck and chest. Use the back of the carder to pat down the fleece all over. This will smooth the surface and pack the wool.

## Using a Trimming Stand (Optional)

Do not leave your lamb unattended in a trimming stand. To place your lamb in the stand the first time, it needs to be taught that it's ok to jump up. The first couple of times get some help from one or two other people so that neither you nor the lamb is injured. If the lamb is frightened the first time you put it on the stand it will be harder to get on the next time. Go slowly.

Lead the lamb to the back of the stand facing forward. One person takes the halter and goes on the left side of the stand. The other person lift the lambs front legs into the stand and moves to the back of the lamb while the first person puts pressure in the halter to move it forward. You may have to lift the back legs onto the stand as well. Secure the halter around the headpiece shank and tie. Place a chain around the back of the lamb's head and secure it. Make sure the headpiece is at a comfortable height for the lamb to stand. The lamb will test the edges of the stand. Stand by to make sure it doesn't fall over, but let the lamb dip a foot off the table as it learns how much space there is for it to move around. It will quickly learn to stand still. When the lamb learns it is ok to hop up on the stand trimming becomes a one-person job. Never leave the lamb unattended. If you are purchasing a trimming stand, look for one with ramps and side rails. These are easier and safer to use.



## Haltering

To put the halter on, place the halter over the ears making sure the nose piece is not so low on the nose that it restricts the airway. The shank then tightens under the chin and you lead the lamb from the left side. If the lamb is shown with a halter, do not use the halter to lead. Instead, lay the shank in your left hand so that it is not dragging on the ground. With the left hand and halter shank placed under the lamb's chin, the right hand is used to move the lamb by the dock. As soon as the lamb moves, place your right hand behind the ears to help control the lamb.

## The Use of Halters in the Show Ring

The use of the halter depends on the age level or experience of the member.

- Juniors are allowed to show with halters;
- Intermediates are allowed to show with halter or can go without;
- Seniors must show without halters.

However, these are possible guidelines only, and are not mandatory in the 4-H Alberta Sheep Project Policies. Please check the rules of the show you are entering regarding halter usage.

## Showing<sup>1</sup>

The key to show ring success is to present your animal as efficiently and effectively as possible. A good show person will always make the animal look the best that it can, emphasizing the good points and de-emphasizing any weak points.

Don't crowd your lamb in the line of exhibitors waiting to enter the show ring. Leave plenty of room between you and the next exhibitor. Bring the lamb into the ring slowly, keeping a nice, constant speed. Move the lamb with one hand under the jaw and the other hand either on the dock or behind the ears. Your lamb will be nervous. Calmly stay in control. Remember that the first impression that a judge has of you and your lamb is a very important one.

Once in the ring move into position and set your lamb up. Always set the legs closest to the judge first. You will have the most control if you reach over the top of the animal to set the legs with your free hand. However, many young people cannot reach over the top of older lambs or sheep. You will need to do what is most comfortable for you. Set all four legs squarely under the lamb. You may want to set the hind legs slightly wider than the front legs. This makes the lamb look wider from behind.

**Whenever you move the lamb, whether into the ring or while showing, always keep the animal between you and the judge. Do not block the judge's view of your lamb. To turn the animal, keep your hand on the jaw, not the throat that might choke the lamb making it cough. Turn the lamb's head toward your belt buckle. Slowly move the lamb toward you. Switch hands until you stand at the opposite shoulder. Keep an eye on the judge and pay attention to anyone directing activity in the ring.**

## Show Technique

The art of exhibiting a lamb rests on how much time the exhibitor has invested in preparing and training the lamb for show day. On show day the exhibitor's ability to keep his/her animal under perfect control will bring out the best in the lamb. Show technique means knowing what type of control to use in different situations.

<sup>1</sup>Ohio State Extension. 2011. Sheep Resource Handbook for Market and Breeding Projects. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Extension. 97. Note that references to "sheep" were changed to "lamb" for this publication.

### **Lamb is Posed with the Judge at its Rear and Viewing From a Distance**

You should be facing your lamb with a hand grasping each cheek, or one hand under the chin and one hand behind the head. You should be standing or in a crouch, as long as you can see the judge. Your lamb should be posed with feet moderately spread, but tucked under enough so the lamb's back does not sag. If possible stand the lamb on level ground or with its front feet on a slight elevation. You may bend your knees to brace yourself against a sudden movement of the lamb, but may not kneel on one or both knees. Do not place your hands at any other place on the lamb, such as over the shoulders or neck.

### **Judge Approaches Rear of Lamb to Handle It**

The same grasp should be maintained. You should be standing, bending your knees and a slight downward pull on the lamb's head will serve to control it. Put your knee against the lamb's brisket to prevent it from bolting when the judge comes up to it and is handling it.

### **Judge Views Lamb from its Right Side**

You should now stand at lamb's left side, near its head, and slip your left hand under the lamb's jaw (well out toward the muzzle). The right hand should not touch the lamb except to rub the belly if you need to calm it. The lamb's head should be at a natural, normal level, neither too high nor too low.

### **Judge Views the Front of the Lamb**

The same position as described above, standing at the left of the lamb's shoulder, should be maintained. Do not move too far to the rear and stretch at arm's length to hold the lamb's head. If the lamb has changed its front leg position, the quick lift and drop by a cheek grasp can best correct it. Do not worry too much about hind feet being slightly out of position.

### **Judge Views Lamb from its Left Side**

You are correct in moving between the judge and your lamb to the opposite (right) side around the lamb's front end. Remember good show technique means you have control over your lamb. Never stretch around rear end or step over the lamb's back.



### **Judge Asks You, the Exhibitor, to Move the Lamb**

You should be on the opposite side of the lamb from the judge. If you are on the lamb's left side, your left hand should be under the lamb's chin. Keep your hand well out towards the muzzle, not choking him by holding his throat. Your right hand, with fingers closed, should be on the lamb's dock. It is considered very poor showmanship to grasp the wool with an open-fingered hand or pull the wool at any time. Pulling your lamb by its wool will cause bruising. While it is fairly "showy" to move the lamb without touching its dock, this often results in loss of control and would not be considered good showmanship to loose your lamb in showring. The lamb should move at a fairly slow and even pace with its back level and head in normal position. The judge is looking for animals with free-moving, natural gaits.

Dusting off shavings and straw after lamb has risen should be done only as soon as the judge has indicated he is moving onto the next lamb. Get the lamb posed first, then dust it off.

In the line, or at any time the lamb is being viewed by the judge, calmness and control are far more important than showy gesturing and arms-length posing which allow the possibility of losing the lamb. Watch the position of the lamb more than you watch the judge. Have your lamb calmly "showing" its best at all times. Excess movement, positioning or 'fixing' is distracting.

If the lamb should bolt away, do not run after it and tackle it in football fashion. Follow the lamb as quietly as possible to a corner or position where you can catch it quickly. As soon as the lamb is caught (under the chin), lift its head up. You have more control over a lamb if you keep its head up and nose slightly raised.

### **Showmanship Etiquette**

- Be sure you, your clothes and boots are neat and clean. Check the show guidelines or standards for specific clothing requirements. Do not chew gum. Tie long hair back away from your face.
- Be alert, polite and courteous to the judge and other show people. Always be on time for a show.
- You should appear keen but relaxed. Regardless of where you are placed, accept the judge's decision in a sportsmanlike manner. Remember that the class is not over until the class exits the ring. Keep showing until you are out of the ring.
- Keep your animal under control at all times. Keep glancing at the judge to watch for his/her directions.
- Be prepared to lead any animal that the judge designates .
- Be prepared to answer questions that would normally be asked by a judge about a lamb such as birth date, breed line, and diet.
- Avoid grandstanding or showing off. Don't be sidetracked by members of the audience.
- Always shake hands with the champion and the reserve champion. Don't forget to thank the judge for his/her time and for sharing their expertise with you and your club. Sportsmanship is a big part of the show!

