

# Show Lamb Preparation and Showmanship

## Show Preparation

Once you have put in the work, it is time to take your lamb to the show. The big event you have been practicing for is finally here, but there are tasks to be done in the days leading up to the show. While preparing to leave, here are some things to keep in mind.

### *The Week Before the Show*

It may seem early, but the week before is the optimal time to put the finishing touches on your lamb. This includes making sure your lamb is healthy, eating and drinking well, and you have worked with your lamb enough to be successful on show day. During the week, start hydrating your lamb by adding electrolytes to the lamb's water using one of the many electrolyte mixes and homemade "drench" recipes. Check the show rules to find out whether drenching is allowed. Adding a electrolyte mixture to your lamb's feed may be helpful.

Evaluate the lamb's "fill" or belly size daily in the week leading up to the show. A large belly is undesirable in the show ring, but reducing it in a healthy way takes time. If you notice extra belly, try adding water to your lamb's feed to reduce it. This wet feeding technique keeps your lamb from filling up on water immediately after eating dry feed, which can cause excess belly.

As you prepare to leave for the show, practice loading your lamb on and off of the trailer. Make sure your lamb is used to being placed on the fitting stand, blown dry with a blower, and having its legs brushed, all of which will happen on show day. Your job will be easier if your lamb already has had these experiences.

### *Shearing/Clipping*

Protecting your lamb's hide is very important. Lambs naturally produce the oil lanolin, which keeps the hide moist and fresh. Because washing removes lanolin from the wool, lambs should not be washed until it is time to clip them for show. Shearing should be minimal, except for a rough-shear during hot sum-

mer months. This is typically done using a large set of sheep-head clippers to leave wool slightly longer. There is no need to wash sheep before shearing.

Read and follow the show rules as to wool length and whether or not clippers are allowed on the show grounds. When clipping a lamb for show, use a shorter set of blades, typically a fine or surgical length, on a set of well-oiled clippers. Your lamb should be used to being placed on a stand before the first clipping. Wait to clip your lamb until as close to show day as possible. Too long a wait between clipping and showing can cause the hide to dry out and wrinkle. Wash the lamb with shampoo before clipping, and then blow dry until the body and legs dry completely.

Watch these videos on clipping sheep: [Shearing and Fitting Your Sheep for the Show Ring](https://youtu.be/6XcjHWWt0jg) (<https://youtu.be/6XcjHWWt0jg>) and [Shearing Show Lambs Part 2](https://youtu.be/hAtGwiFU7QQ) (<https://youtu.be/hAtGwiFU7QQ>).

After your lamb has been clipped, condition the hide with lotion using a product such as Corn Huskers or a brand of hide lotion from a show supply store. Mix one bottle of lotion to one spray bottle of water, and apply it to the lamb's body.

### *Packing for the Show*

The items listed below are essential for preparing your lamb for show day. Use this checklist and mark each item off as it is packed.

- feed (with a feeder)
- water bucket
- soap
- scrub brush
- wool card/leg brush
- halters/blankets
- water hose
- hay
- electrolytes

- hide lotion (Corn Huskers)
- bedding
- health papers (if required)
- lamb stand (if available)
- towels
- blower (if available)

## Leaving for the Show

The trip to the show can be one of the most stressful times for your lamb. As you prepare to leave, here are some important things to keep in mind.

- Feed your lamb half of its normal feeding before leaving.
- If you did not begin giving lambs electrolytes the week before, start adding them to the water now to keep lambs hydrated.
- By now, you should have practiced loading lambs on and off the trailer several times so they are accustomed to it.

## At the Show

Once you arrive at the show, unpack and settle your lamb into the new surroundings. This can be stressful and the lamb may be hesitant to eat or drink. Be calm and follow these steps to keep your lamb stress-free.

- Make sure the pen has clean bedding and help your lamb get settled in.
- Offer your lamb water, preferably with electrolytes. Your lamb may not want to drink. If the show rules permit, a proper drenching can help keep your lamb hydrated.
- Some shows conduct an official weigh-in, while other shows allow you to declare your own weight with weigh-backs in class. Know the show rules, and weigh in your lamb as soon as possible so you can feed.
- Once you have weighed in your lamb, offer it the other half of its feeding. The show time will determine when and how much you feed.

- If you have a few days before your show, return your lamb to its normal feeding routine. If you are showing within the next day, hand-feeding is best to control fill. NEVER stop feeding your lamb completely as this may be harmful to its health. If you need to reduce your lamb's belly, feed smaller amounts more often throughout the day until it resumes its normal daily consumption of feed. *Do not forget to supply quality hay.*
- Continue to exercise your lamb at the show. Most shows allow you to take your lamb out and walk it around the barn, so take advantage of this. Exercising helps keep your lamb calm as well.

## Show Time

When showtime finally arrives, it can be stressful. Remember to relax and enjoy the experience. Plan to be there early and take the steps required to be successful in the ring. The first thing to do after arriving at the fairgrounds is to take your lamb for exercise. This should not be too intense, but enough to walk off the jitters. Feed and water your lamb according to its fill and belly. It is important that your lamb gets some feed and water before showing to feel its best. Determine your class and estimate what time you will be showing.

Wash and condition your lamb, allowing plenty of time to dry and get your lamb ready for the ring before your class. After washing, towel dry the lamb's body, then blow dry and brush out the legs. Many fitting practices are used to make sheep look their best, but some shows may limit the use of certain products. Know and follow the show rules.

Before you enter the ring, apply a small amount of hide lotion to your lamb to give the hide a smooth hand and soft touch. Once your lamb is ready to show, arrive on time for your class and enjoy your experience in the ring.

## Showmanship

Showmanship is essential when showing sheep. Of all the livestock species, showing sheep requires the most physical contact with the animal. The exhibitor and lamb must have a good working relationship, so spend time practicing before the show. It takes practice to be

able to exhibit your lamb in a way that promotes its strengths and disguises its weaknesses.

## At Home

Working with your lamb at home is the key to success in the show ring. As soon as you get your lamb, start spending time with it. Lambs are often nervous at first, so it is important to develop a relationship and build trust. The easiest way to do this is to find a bucket and go sit on it in the pen. Eventually the lamb will warm up to you and you can start touching it to get it used to human contact.

Once your lamb has calmed down, it is time to begin training. Start by teaching your lamb to walk on a halter. While the lamb is likely to fight you at first, be patient. For tips on halter breaking, refer to the “General Care” section of the Show Lamb Guide. Teaching your lamb to brace is important. Bracing describes what happens as your lamb pushes into you to improve the appearance of its muscles, similar to you flexing your muscles. The judge will approach to handle your lamb, so train your lamb to brace properly. For this to happen, you need to know how to position yourself, which is discussed next.

## Proper Technique

Teaching your lamb to cooperate is important, but knowing what you need to do also is important in getting the best performance from your lamb. When setting up a lamb, your body must be positioned properly. Hands should be cupped around the base of the ears and flat against the lamb’s head as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Proper hand placement on the lamb's head. Photo by Payton Dahmer.

When positioning your legs, your left leg should be the one bracing against the lamb. Your left leg should be pointed directly at the lamb, pushing diagonally across its chest. Your right leg should be slightly behind you, giving you something to brace yourself with as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. This is the correct position when bracing your lamb. Photo by Payton Dahmer.

## Placement of Feet and Legs

Knowing how you should be positioned, focus on the position of your lamb. Your lamb’s legs should be set square and to all four corners so the weight is distributed evenly (Figure 3).



Figure 3. This is the correct way to set your lamb's feet. Be sure your lamb is not too stretched out nor too scrunched together from the side. Photo by Payton Dahmer.

## Walking

Information on halter breaking your lamb can be found in the "Halter Breaking" section of *Show Lamb Care and Management*, MF3526. Once the lamb is halter broken, the next step is to teach it to walk by hand. Typically, sheep are shown without a halter, but young exhibitors may use one if they are unable

to hold on to the animal. Your lamb should walk alongside you, with its head slightly in front of you. If possible, follow another exhibitor in the ring as lambs follow each other easily, but often struggle to lead. *Practice* is the only way to train your lamb to walk properly on show day. Sheep do not take to this quickly, so patience and practice at home is crucial.

## Show Ring Attire

You have put in the hard work to prepare for the show, so you want to look the part when you are in the ring. When dressing for the show, be professional. This means nice jeans with no holes or rips, a collared shirt or nice blouse with nice boots or durable shoes. Looking nice is important, but flashier is not better. Avoid distracting or impractical clothes.

## Other Tips

Once you have mastered the basics, small details can take your showmanship game to the next level. Here are a few examples:

- Keep your lamb straight in line and leave ample space between you and the exhibitors around you.
- Be courteous at all times and mindful of the judge and other exhibitors.
- While it may seem basic, be sure your lamb is clean and well presented.

**Payton Dahmer**

Graduate Teaching Assistant

**Alison Crane, Ph.D.**

Sheep and Meat Goat Specialist

**Department of Animal Sciences and Industry**

**K-STATE**  
Research and Extension

Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

Publications from Kansas State University are available at [bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu](http://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu)

Date shown is that of publication or last revision. Contents of this publication may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. All other rights reserved. In each case, credit Payton Dahmer and Alison Crane, *Show Lamb Preparation and Showmanship*, Kansas State University, March 2021.

**Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service**

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of K-State Research and Extension, Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts.