

# **A Quick Guide to Club Lamb Selection**

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The selection of a lamb for a project is one of the most important decisions you must make. The type of lamb you select will have a major influence on the project's results. However, remember that a winning lamb is a combination of good selection, good nutritional management, a good exercise program and outstanding showmanship. People differ in their ability to select animals. Some have a natural eye for selecting young animals of high caliber, while others may never develop this ability. Do not hesitate to ask for help from someone with these skills. It may be your county Extension agent, Future Farmers of America instructor, parent or another leader in your county. Also, many breeders are very willing to assist you in your selection. When selecting a lamb, be aware of wool length and fat thickness. If possible, select your club lamb after shearing. Young lambs that are bloomy and fat always look good, while young lambs that are thin do not. Learn to look past fat and recognize muscle so that you pick a lamb that is genetically superior. When purchasing a lamb, it is important to know something about the lamb producer. Do not hesitate to ask questions about the lamb's bloodlines and the age of the lamb. Consider the following when selecting a lamb: classification, muscle, structural correctness, style and balance, and growth potential.

## **Muscle**

Proper lamb selection depends on proper evaluation of muscle. To determine muscle, look at the shape of the loin and size of forearm. Select a lamb that feels firm or hard muscled. The lamb should have a good expression of muscle from the shoulder to the rump. It should have a long, level, square rump with good width at the pin bones (dock). A good indicator of muscling is the forearm and rear leg muscle. The widest part of the leg, when viewed from behind, should be through the middle of the leg or the stifle area. Also, a lamb that walks and stands wide is generally going to be more heavily muscled.

## **Structural Correctness**

Structural correctness refers to the skeletal system or bone structure of an animal. A lamb should hold its head erect and the neck should extend out of the top of the shoulder. A lamb should travel and stand wide and straight on both its front and rear legs and the legs should be placed squarely under the body. A lamb should have a strong top and a long, level rump. It should be heavy boned and be strong on its pasterns. Avoid open-shouldered, weak-topped, steep-rumped lambs.

## **Style and Balance**

Style and balance refer to the way all body parts blend together, how the front end matches the rear end, and how “eye appealing” a lamb is. When viewed from the side, a lamb should have a clean front, smooth shoulder, level top, level rump, trim middle and straight legs. Because all club lambs are shorn smooth, it is absolutely necessary that lambs have a tight hide and be free of wrinkles. A lamb should never be selected in the wool, if possible. A good, smooth, thin-hided lamb has eye appeal and will handle well when properly finished. A lamb that is balanced, smooth, pretty, and holds up its head is the first one you notice when you walk in the pen.

## **Growth Potential**

The ability of an animal to grow rapidly is very important. Generally, larger framed lambs, as indicated by a long head, neck, cannon bone, and body, will grow faster, be larger, and be more competitive in the show ring. Lambs that are extremely long in the loin and rump will have an advantage over others.

The qualities of muscle, structural correctness, style and balance, and growth potential can define a competitive prospective club lamb. Other selection factors to consider when evaluating lambs that bring together a combination of these four important qualities in order of importance are:

- Attractiveness

- Length of body

- Height

- Structural correctness: Legs, feet, neck set, straightness of top, width of pin bones.

- Muscle: Loin eye, depth of twist, size of forearm, and shape down the top.

- Width

- Firmness of muscle

- Depth of body

- Extension of front end

- Shape of loin

Last of all remember that muscle and fat will play a part in your selection. Learn to identify the difference in fat and muscle on a lamb. An ideal finished market lamb will carry from .10 to .20 inches or .15 inches on average, of fat thickness over the 13<sup>th</sup> rib. Market lambs that carry less or more condition are undesirable. It is important to know this when selecting a prospect. It is necessary to select an animal that best combines these desirable traits to become a winning market lamb.