



Sheep Showmanship

The goal of sheep showmanship is to show the animal to the best of your ability by properly presenting your animal and demonstrating your knowledge on sheep. You will likely show a market lamb, but may show a breeding ewe or ram. It is important you study meat sheep as well as wool sheep. Make sure you find an exhibitor enrolled in the sheep project to learn all you can from them and their project. Be prepared to handle a lamb with or without a halter and know the different requirements for each breed. For more information seek out member and leaders of the sheep project. Always be sure to keep eye contact with the judge, never obstruct the view of the animal from the judge, and have fun!

Handling Sheep

Showing sheep is similar to any other breed of livestock. To lead your sheep, stand on the left-hand side of your animal while holding the animal's head under its chin. If your animal will not walk or behave properly it is also acceptable to place your right hand behind the sheep's ears. Keep your sheep's head up at an appropriate angle that allows it to walk at a natural pace. Make sure the ears are forward and alert. Moving in a clockwise circle around the ring, always keep your sheep between you and the judge. If your sheep will not move, take your right hand and gently push on the dock. Watch the judge for further instruction. If the judge tells you to stop walking, stop and set up your sheep. If the judge tells you to line up side-by-side, quickly walk your sheep into the lineup and set up with the nose of your animal even with the first sheep in the lineup. If your animal will not stay set up, take it out of line and circle it back into position. Always keep eye contact with the judge and watch for further instruction.

Posing Sheep

When positioning a sheep always start with the rear legs. Using your hand, lift each leg softly setting each foot squarely beneath the animal with the rear legs slightly back. Never pull the front legs of the sheep off the ground to place them. Keep the sheep's head held up at all times. When the judge handles the sheep, do not let it move. If the sheep roaches its back, gently push it down with your fingers to create a straight back. If your sheep dips in its back, gently tap the belly until the back becomes as straight as possible. When showing a market lamb, gently push your knee into the breast of the animal with its nose slightly pointed upwards so it pushes back into your knee. This is called bracing your lamb and allows the judge to evaluate muscle expression. If the judge comes to the front of your sheep, continue to hold the head high with ears at an alert position and stand next to the sheep to let the judge evaluate the breast and front of the sheep. If the judge handles your animal, immediately reposition your sheep as they walk away.

To contact an expert in your area, visit msue.anr.msu.edu/experts or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464)

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Showmanship Questions and Answers

Questions:

1. What is a lamb's gestation period?
2. How many teeth does a lamb have?
3. Approximately how old is a lamb at the time of fair?
4. What breed of lamb do you have?
5. At what weight is a lamb considered 'finished'?
6. What are some common breeds of sheep raised in the United States?
7. What is the highest value cut on a lamb?

Answers:

1. 145-155 days
2. 8 incisors and 24 molars
3. 5-6 months
4. If you have a market lamb, a crossbred is likely. Ask the owner beforehand and be sure to study all breeds of sheep.
5. 130-160 pounds
6. Suffolk, Hampshire, Dorset, Southdown, Shropshire, Columbia, and Merino
7. The loin

