

## Feeding Your Market Lambs: A Youth Guide

Tom Platt, Extension Educator

Feeding your market lambs to reach proper weight and finish at show time is a challenge you and your family will enjoy. Following the simple guidelines in this fact sheet will help you successfully complete your market lamb project.

Selection is important. Select young, healthy lambs that have plenty of growth potential. Be sure that they are in the right weight range. A growthy, properly fed winter-born lamb should gain around 0.7 pounds per day from weaning until a spring show. For example, a lamb selected on February 25 has 74 days to grow until a May 10th show. Gaining at the rate of 0.7 pounds per day, it will gain 52 pounds during the feeding period. If it is to weigh 110 pounds at show time, it must weigh about 58 pounds when selected ( $110 - 52 = 58$ ). A 40 pound lamb probably won't make it. Take a scale to the farm when you select lambs if there isn't one already available.

The same approach can be used when selecting lambs for the fall fair, although in this case, it is important not to select a lamb that is too big or too old and consequently might be too fat at show time. Spring born lambs should be selected for fall shows. A simple calculation of final weight and expected daily gain will help you select a lamb of the right starting weight. For example, a lamb selected in the middle of May for a show held the first week in September will have about 105 days to reach market weight. Spring born lambs shown in the fall can be fed to gain at a slightly slower rate over the summer than winter born lambs that must be pushed to finish for a spring show, because the feeding period is longer. Your spring born lamb can be fed to gain about 0.6 pounds per day during the summer. At this rate, it will gain a total of 63 pounds ( $0.6 \times 105 = 63$ ) from selection until show time. A 50 to 60 pound lamb selected in May should be just right in September.

Be sure your lambs were castrated as babies. Worm them if they have not been wormed within a month, and vaccinate them for type C and D enterotoxemia (overeating disease) if they haven't already been vaccinated. Check for keds and treat them if necessary.

Now you are ready to feed your lambs. Keep their pen, feeder, and water trough clean. Lambs should have fresh water and trace mineralized salt with selenium available at all times. Use sheep salt because it has less copper in it than cow salt, and lambs are more sensitive to copper toxicity. Weigh your lambs again and record their weight and date on a chart tacked to the wall. Weigh lambs every other week before their morning feeding and calculate daily gain since the last weighing. The wall chart record of these weighings will tell you at a glance if your lambs are performing as expected and that they are being fed and cared for properly. If daily gain has fallen off, ask your parents or club advisor for some help in determining why.

Lambs should be fed twice daily at the same time every day. You should ask a family member or friend to do your feeding chores if you are not available at their regular feeding time.

Lambs fed for spring shows need to grow a little faster and consequently need a little higher proportion of grain in their ration than lambs being fed for fall shows. Ration guidelines listed below are for two classes of lambs: young lambs (2 to 3 months old)

requiring rapid growth for spring shows and older lambs (4 to 7 months old) requiring moderate growth for fall shows.

	Lamb Weight, lb.	Daily Gain, lb.	Daily Feed, lb.	Daily Grain, lb.	Daily Hay, lb.	Total Protein %
Young Lambs	44	.66	2.8	2.4	0.4	15.0
	66	.72	3.4	2.9	0.5	13.5
	88+	.88	3.7	3.1	0.6	13.0
Older Lambs	66	.65	3.3	2.0	1.3	13.0
	88+	.60	3.9	2.9	1.0	10.5

The hay in these rations should be good quality alfalfa or alfalfa-grass mix. Grain for sheep can be fed whole; it does not need to be ground or rolled. A protein supplement such as soybean meal or a commercial protein supplement containing at least 35% natural protein should be mixed with the grain at the rate of 1 pound of protein supplement for every 3 to 4 pounds of grain, depending on the protein content of the supplement. Alternatively, a commercial grain mix can be used that already has a crude protein content of 14% to 16%. Using a commercial mix is certainly more convenient, and there is less chance of mixing error. Make sure the commercial feed is labeled for feeding sheep or general livestock.

Remember, these are *only* guidelines. Watch your lambs closely and make feeding adjustments as necessary. Your lambs should be full fed, meaning they will just clean up everything offered them between feedings and aren't standing around hungry during the day or night.

The rations listed above for young lambs contain 85% grain mix and 15% hay. For the older lambs, the rations contain 60% to 75% grain mix and 25% to 40% hay. Lambs unaccustomed to this much grain cannot be started on this much grain all at once without becoming sick and suffering damage to their stomachs. Rather, they should be started out at about 1/3 of the grain recommended for their weight and the difference fed in hay. Then, over a three week period, the grain can be slowly increased and the hay decreased until the desired amount of each is being fed.

Good luck with your lambs!