Livestock Judging Guide

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Module 8: Sheep

Judging Breeding Ewes
Judging Breeding Ewes

Ideal breeding ewe:
- Possess an abundance of scale
- Bigger, longer, heavy-boned sheep are preferred
- Long, level topline
- High volume or capacity:
  - Deep bodied, with bold spring of rib
  - Wide, deep chest
- Natural thickness from end to end
- Structurally correct and sound
Ideal Breeding Ewe

- Long, level rump
- Square rump & dock
- Heavy boned
- Deep, full plump leg
- Muscular, thick, long loin
- Deep bodied
- Deep full heart girth
- Correct set of legs
- Long neck
- Trim fronted
- Trim, firm finish
- Large framed, well-balanced
- Bold spring of rib
- Naturally thick top
- Long across stifle
- Muscular forearm
- Plump & full through center & lower leg
- Legs placed wide apart
Judging Breeding Ewes

Steps to Judging Sheep
- Begin from the ground and work up
- Then from rear to front
- Rank based on traits of importance they possess
- Put greatest emphasis on most valuable traits
- Eliminate easy placings
- Rank the remainder on bases of volume of important traits
Judging Breeding Ewes

- Ranking of Traits for Breeding Sheep
  - Balance and style
  - Frame size
  - Soundness and structural correctness
  - Capacity or Volume
  - Degree of muscling
  - Degree of leanness
  - Wool
Judging Market Lambs

Evaluating Balance and Style

Equal portions of:
- Width
- Depth
- Length (special emphasis)
- Should be wide and deep through rear (leg)
- Tight and trim through front end
- Majority of the weight is in back half
Judging Breeding Ewes

Proper Balance

“Christmas Tree” Shape, when viewed from Side & Rear, with majority of weight in the back half
Judging Breeding Ewes

Poorly Balance

- Heavy-fronted, deep and low necked, broken topped, too heavy through middle & steep rumped

Lacks Balance

- Straight and stylish, but lacks balance, wrong “Christmas tree” shape, too heavy-fronted
Judging Breeding Ewes

- Evaluating Balance and Style
  - Style deals with:
    - Correctness of structure
    - Straightness of design
  - Sheep should have:
    - Straight top line
    - Neat shoulder that blends smoothly into neck and ribs
Judging Breeding Ewes

Examples of Proper Style

- Straight top line, high & correct neck-shoulder connection
- Neat front, smooth at point of shoulder, clean, flat breast area and very high neck set
- Level rump structure that is desired in sheep
Judging Breeding Ewes

Lacks Style

Too deep necked, too low in neck placement & too opened shouldered

Weak topped & too steep in its rump

Lacks Style
Judging Breeding Ewes

Evaluating Frame Size

Larger framed ewes, within the same breed, indicates:
- Growth
- Increased productivity

Ewes with more size & scale are desired if:
- Balanced & stylish
- Structurally sound

Larger, longer, heavy-boned sheep are in demand by all breeds

Frame size varies between different breeds
Judging Breeding Ewes

Evaluating Soundness

Correct set or angle to feet, legs & joints are extremely important to:

- Production (growth)
- Longevity (soundness)

Evaluate soundness by observing:

- Feet and Pasterns
- Hocks
- Knees
- Rump
- Shoulders
Judging Breeding Ewes

Feet and Pasterns

- Strong with slight angle
- Provides cushion for joints

Correct set to pastern, good depth of heel and big foot setting flat & even
Judging Breeding Ewes

Incorrect Structure

too much set to pastern

extreme set to pastern

poor depth of heel (hoof-skin junction)

very poor depth of heel
Hocks

- Correct structure is critical to:
  - Mobility
  - Longevity
- Should have 20 degree of set or angle
- Should be clean, flat & free of swelling
- Gives flex & power on the move
- Good measure of correctness:
  - Ability to get rear leg beyond the dock when walking

Correct set to hocks
Judging Breeding Ewes

Sickle-hocked

Too much set to the hocks
Knees should be:
- Square with the body when viewed from the front
- Slightly set back when viewed from the side

Knee “bucked over”, lacks cushion & will restrict movement

Knee bowed slightly inward
Judging Breeding Ewes

Rump

Ideal rump is:
- Average to above average in length
- Very slightly sloping from front to back

Short, steep rump

Long, level rump
Judging Breeding Ewes

Shoulders

- Proper shoulder angle is critical for good length of stride
- Shape & tightness of front end is important for proper balance
- Point of shoulder should be trim & smooth
Judging Breeding Ewes

Examples of correct shoulder structure

- Desired tight shape at the top of the shoulder
- Shoulder blends smoothly into neck & forerib
- Desired smoothness at the point of the shoulder
Judging Breeding Ewes

Evaluating Capacity or Volume

- Amount of body volume a ewe possesses
- Necessary to perform at a high level
- And, still maintain body condition

Associated with:
- Production traits
- Performance traits
Judging Breeding Ewes

- Evaluating Capacity or Volume
  - Determined by:
    - Body width (spring of rib)
    - Body depth
    - Body length
  - Ewes should be:
    - Wide bodied
    - Good spring of rib
    - Deep & wide through chest
  - Depth should be:
    - Uniform from front to back
    - Through heart girth & rear flank
Evaluating Degree of Muscling

- Follow same basic guidelines as with market lambs
- “Natural thickness” is preferred over extreme muscle
- First - evaluated through center of leg for thickness
- Second – Examine width between rear feet
  - On the move
  - Standing
Evaluating Degree of Muscling

- Compare base width to top width
  - Heavy muscled ewes – base width = top width
  - Don’t be tricked by additional width due to fat cover

Other areas to evaluate degree of muscling:
- Length of hindsaddle (loin and leg)
  - From last rib to dock
- Width & length of loin
- Shape over rack (grooves shape to the rack is desired)
Judging Breeding Ewes

- Center Leg and Base Width
  - Light muscled (Narrow width)
  - Average muscled (Average width)
  - Heavy muscled (Wide based)
  - Square, wide top shape
Judging Breeding Ewes

- Width and Length of Loin
  - Long, wide loin is desirable

Areas to evaluate in determining width and length of loin
Judging Breeding Ewes

- Length of Hindsaddle
- Contains most valuable cuts
- Should be greater in length & weight than foresaddle
Judging Breeding Ewes

- Shape Over Rack
  - Fairly high-priced cut
  - Grooved shape over rack indicates high degree of muscling
Evaluating Degree of Finish

- Should be lean with 0.15 to 0.20 inches of backfat thickness
- Degree of finish is influenced by:
  - Amount of muscling
  - Frame size
  - Stage of maturity
- Fat sheep will be widest over their top
Judging Breeding Ewes

Ideal Finish

Very trim, with base width at least as wide as top

Ideal Finish

Very clean and trim over & behind the shoulder, extremely trim & neat through underline
Judging Breeding Ewes

Evaluating Wool

- Not a priority with mutton-type sheep
- May have classes with wool-type breeds
- Fleece should be:
  - Dense
  - Of good character (have distinct crimp)
  - Clean & bright
  - Free of black fibers
- Skin should be healthy pink color
Judging Breeding Ewes

Evaluating Wool

Never open wool on the back of sheep
Open fleece on the side
Look for:
Length
Grade density
Uniformity of wool
Color of skin
Test Your Skills

Place this class of breeding ewes

1

2

3

4
Official Placing

Official Placing:  2 – 3 – 1 – 4
Cuts:          2 – 3 – 4