Livestock Judging Guide

By
Neal Smith
Extension Area Specialist – 4-H
Module 8: Sheep

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

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

Lacks Style

Weak topped & too steep in its rump
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

Frame size varies between different breeds.
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

Big feet with even toes, set flat on surface and square with animal’s body

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

Incorrect Structure

[Image showing examples of ewe feet with notes: 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
Judging Breeding Ewes

Sickle-hocked

Too much set to the hocks
Judging Breeding Ewes

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

Buck-kneed

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

Knock-kneed

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

Incorrect shoulder structure
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

Bold spring of rib
Judging Breeding Ewes

- 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
Judging Breeding Ewes

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
Judging Breeding Ewes

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
Official Placing

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