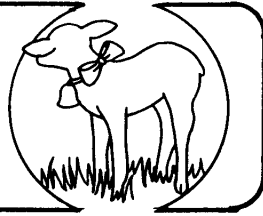


LAMB'S KORNER



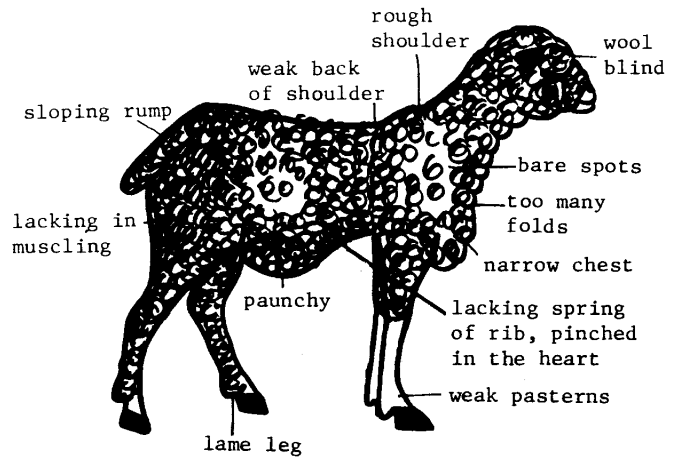
by Mary Lis

With money being so tight nowadays, knowledgeable and careful purchasing has become a necessity. The philosophy of getting the best for the money you have to spend, holds true for sheep, too. Buying good sheep is investing money with a potential return in lamb and wool. So, looking around for a while before you decide is a good idea. You can use this as an opportunity to see different facilities and hear different management ideas.

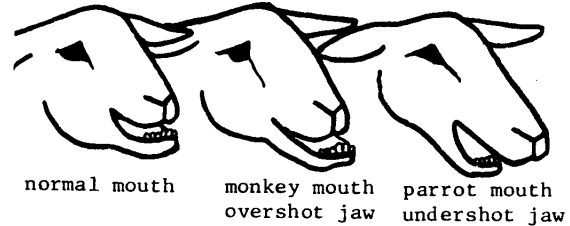
When you evaluate and select sheep for purchase, consider these criteria:

1) Conformation

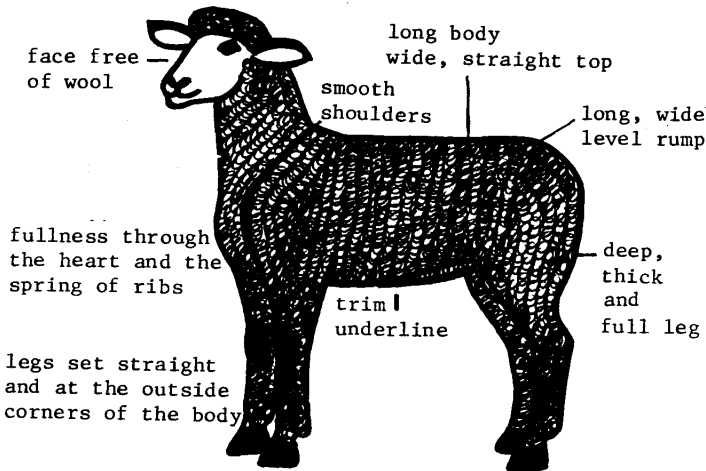
- a. adequate frame
- b. smooth shoulders
- c. fullness through the heart area and the spring of ribs
- d. long body, with major emphasis on length from the last rib to the dock
- e. wide and straight top
- f. long, wide, and level rump
- g. deep, thick, and full leg of lamb or mutton
- h. overall balance (blending together of body parts)
- i. sex character. Ewes should look feminine and rams should look masculine. Masculine rams are generally more rugged, active, and aggressive than rams which lack this quality.
- j. breed type. Breed type is an important consideration in purebred livestock; without it, breed identity is lost. But, do not get carried away to the point where you forget everything else.



- b. mouth. Check the sheep's mouth for age, condition of the eight incisors, and jaw malformations like monkey mouth or parrot mouth.
- c. udder. Check the ewe's udder to be sure that both teats are present and functional and that there are no lumps or hard areas.
- d. testicles. Check the ram to be sure that both testicles are present, fully descended, sound and at least average in size. You may want a veterinary exam done on very expensive animals, including a semen evaluation.



SHEEP JAW CONFIGURATIONS



2) Soundness--general health appearance: alert; bright, clean eyes, clean nose, clean tail area, no abscesses or sores, no respiratory problems

- a. feet and legs. When their feet are well trimmed, sheep should be able to stand squarely on them. Select sheep that have strong pasterns and straight legs with plenty of width between them. Crooked legs and weak pasterns can decrease its years of reproductive usefulness. Avoid lameness.

3) Wool

Select heavy-shearing sheep that have dense, uniform, high-quality fleeces with no dark fiber. Spinners can use their personal preferences here to decide on crimp, staple length, fineness and color. Any wool loss can indicate tick or lice infestation, or past illness (fever). Avoid wool blind sheep.

4) Age

There are several things to consider in deciding what age ewes to buy: the quality of the various age groups, the soundness of older ewes, price differences, the amount of production data available, and the years of expected production. Ewes generally reach peak productivity at four to six years of age. Even though yearlings cost more than older ewes, they have sounder udders, more productive years ahead of them, and a lower death loss. Some sheep people prefer to buy a mixed age group with equal numbers of yearlings and older ewes.

In starting into purebred production, sometimes the best investment may be to use highly productive older ewes with several years of production still left rather than to start with a group of high-priced yearling ewes. Here also a mixed age group may have some advantages.



lamb's mouth with 8 incisors; these temporary teeth are called milk teeth



3 yr old mouth with 3 pairs of permanent incisors



yearling mouth with 1 pair of permanent incisors



4 yr old mouth with 4 pairs of permanent incisors



2 yr old mouth with 2 pairs of permanent incisors

broken mouth condition which may begin to occur about 6 yrs of age; a sheep that has lost all incisors is called a gummer



There is increased interest in breeding ewe lambs (6-8 months) to lamb as yearlings. However, the ewe lambs must be well grown (over 100 lbs at breeding) but not fat and must be fed well during pregnancy and lactation. Special attention must be given to them at lambing and to their nutrition after they wean their first lambs. Yearling lambs should be handled as a separate unit, not mixed with the older ewes. If well managed, their mature size will not be affected by lambing them as yearlings.

The age of the ram will determine how many ewes he can service. Under normal field mating conditions, a ram lamb can be used on about 15 ewes, a yearling ram on 25 to 35, and a aged ram on 35 to 45. A good rule of thumb is 3 mature rams for every 100 ewes in the breeding flock.

5) Records

When you buy breeding stock, get all the performance information you can--such factors as weight at 60, 90, or 120 days and weight at one year of age; wool weights. Find out the performance of their progeny, if any, and check the performance of sires and dams. Some breeders have carcass information available, so check on this also. Ask about vaccinations given and the last time they were wormed.

6) Seek veterinary advice on any questionable health conditions or uncertainties you may have.

7) Health certificates--all sheep purchased out-of-state require health certificates for travel. This protects you and the sheep industry.

Remember an informed buyer will spend his money wisely and never regret his purchases when he brings them home. So, take your time and enjoy your new flock.

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