

# ***Rearing a Lamb***

## ***Introduction***

A lamb is a wonderful pet to rear at any age and is often easier for smaller children to handle. Lambs can be successfully reared on small sections while young as they do not require large areas. During spring many farmers have a few motherless lambs and are happy to give these away as pets. Many farmers will also take the lamb back once the child has completed their project. Ram, crypt orchid, ewe and wether lambs as well as long tailed lambs are all eligible to enter competitions organised at the Waikato A&P Show. If requested some farmers may dock the lamb when it is collected. There are local group days and school days that may or may not except entire long tailed rams or crypt orchid lambs into their events.

## ***Recommended Materials***

Lamb

A cover (optional – keeps wool clean) Bottle and suitable teat that a lamb can readily suck on.

Milk – lamb's powder or cow's milk. Calf powder may be used after 3-4 weeks

Plastic comb and brush (No wire brushes)

Cloth

Collar and lead

Shelter

Pen

Bedding

Container for water

## ***Early Days***

If possible choose a lamb that is only a few days old and begin caring for it immediately. This helps to ensure that a strong bond is established between it and the child. Also only choose a lamb that has been fed colostrum<sup>1</sup> as it will have begun to develop a strong healthy immune system. The child needs to give the lamb a name and record its date of birth and breed.

It is most important that the newborn lamb is kept warm. Build a lamb's pen in a sunny position and place a shelter in the pen so that the lamb can keep out of the rain, cold winds or hot sun. Some form of bedding should be used in the shelter. A large box lined with clean shredded newspaper, sacking or clean straw is ideal for shelter as this

<sup>1</sup> This is the first milk made by the animal's mother and is high in energy and antibodies, boosting the newborn's survival chances.

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compensates for the warmth that a lamb receives from its mother. Keep the bedding clean by renewing it regularly. The lamb must be kept warm, dry and clean and the area free from draughts.

## ***Saving Dates for Lambs***

Early Lambs            01<sup>st</sup> July – 19<sup>th</sup> August  
Late Lambs            20<sup>th</sup> August – 20<sup>th</sup> September

These dates can be adjusted by the organising school or group to achieve a better distribution of participants in the events. This helps to distribute the awards among more participants. However the above saving dates are never changed for those entering the Waikato A&P Show.

## ***Daily Care of a Lamb*** ***Feeding***

A newly born lamb must have its mother's colostrum or cow's colostrum. Cow's colostrum is the best alternative to ewe's colostrum. Often dairy farmers have a good supply of this during the lambing period. If this is not available use the following home made mixture of colostrum for at least four days.

### **Recipe for Lamb's Colostrum**

1 litre warm cow's or powdered milk  
1 egg  
1 teaspoon of cod liver oil

Two litres should be sufficient to start a lamb. Newborn lambs require six feeds daily. This milk must not be watered down. Feed the lamb small amounts and often for the first few days, after which the milk of choice can then be introduced. This may be a propriety brand that is formulated to feed new lambs. Ensure that the instructions on the container are read, understood and that the milk replacement is suitable for lambs. After approximately six weeks the number of feeds can be reduced to four times daily until nearly weaned. For example 7am, 11am, 3pm and 7pm. Increase the supply of milk according to the lamb's appetite. An indication of 'fullness' occurs when the lamb's flanks are level with its sides. Lambs should never look bloated. The lamb will need to be fed for a minimum of twelve weeks and should never be weaned until after the final show day. If a lamb refuses a feed it must never be forced as this can indicate health problems. See Health Problems and Some Solutions for Lambs (page 9).

### ***Suggestions for a Daily Lamb Care Routine***

- Feed the lamb regularly during the day and remove any soiled bedding from its shelter.
- Wash bottle and teat after each feed. This aspect of welfare is vital to avoid health problems.
- Clean the lamb daily with a warm damp cloth around face, ears and under the front and back legs. After docking when wounds have healed include the tail area. Brush daily, taking care around naval cord area and docking wounds. Brush lightly with a nylon or natural fibre brush but avoid the wool taking on a 'fluffy' appearance.
- **Do not under any circumstances wash the lamb** as this practice will remove all the natural lanolin from the wool.
- Take the lamb for a walk using a collar and lead with a snap hook on one end. The child should pat, cuddle and continuously talk to the lamb and reward it with praise after working together.

### ***Preparing a Lamb for Show Days***

Training and working with a lamb should start from an early age. The following events are the most popular and are the main events that the child will compete in during the Waikato A&P Show day. However they are not necessarily the only events that the Schools or the Boys and Girls Agricultural Groups may hold on their own days. These events are all designed to challenge the child as they work with their pet.

## ***Events for Lambs***

### ***Most Obvious Pet***

This is an interesting event and can indicate the quality of the relationship between the child and the lamb. To train a lamb for this event the child will need to have someone hold the lamb while s/he stands some distance away with a bottle of milk. The child calls the lamb's name. When the lamb comes to the child it receives a gentle pat on the head, then its bottle. Continue patting while the lamb drinks.

**Note:** on show days the child will not be able to use a bottle of milk so ensure that during practice the use of the bottle is gently faded out. The stages in this event are:

**Stage One: The Start.** The steward holds the lamb. The child takes the lead off and takes it with him/her.

**Stage Two: The Call.** The child walks to the first peg, turns and calls the lamb. Stand back sufficiently to allow the lamb to move around the peg. It is very important to pat the lamb on the head.

**Stage Three: The Follow.** Child walks to the second peg with the pet following behind. Remember not to walk too fast.

**Stage Four: The Catch.** The child runs to the finish, turns and catches the lamb inside the ring. See Figure Two below.

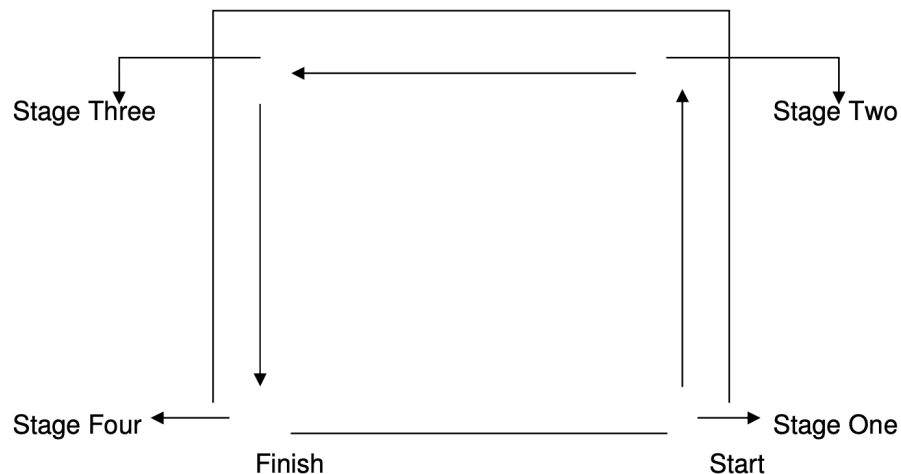
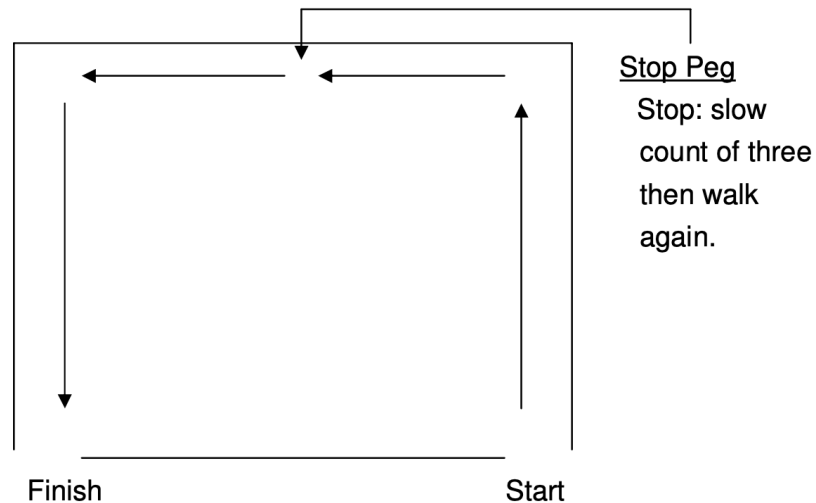


Figure Two: Four Stages that Constitute the Call, Follow and Run as the Most Obvious Pet Event.

## ***Leading***

Daily practice can result in a perfect lead on the show days. The lamb is led anti-clockwise around a 10 metre square. Left-handed children may lead clockwise. Each child leads their pet around the outside of the pegs and stops halfway to a count of three. See Figure Three below.



FigureThree: The Course Indicating the Stop Peg

**Note:** the lead must be held correctly. Form a fist with the right hand and grip the lead with the palm facing up. Leave a length of lead between the hands. The right hand must never be removed from the lead. The left hand should then grip the lead in the same manner but with the palm facing down and the hand not touching the clip. There should remain at most, 30- 40 cm of the lead hanging free from the left hand. If the lead is any longer it should be gathered neatly into the left hand with no fingers through any loops. All control should be exercised by the right hand on the lead.

Check that the collar is not too loose or tight. During the event the lamb should not be touched, hit or nudged and the lead must not be pulled or jerked. The only stop is made at the stop peg (see Figure Three, page 7) or if the lamb needs a toilet break. The child should stand upright at the lamb's shoulder and walk at the same pace as the lamb.

## ***Rearing***

This section of the competition is usually assessed under the following headings of care, condition and cleanliness.

### ***Care***

The child should know the name, breed and date of birth of the lamb. For older children it would be an advantage if they know about the Five in One vaccine given for Pulpy Kidney, Tetanus, Blackleg, Malignant Oedema and Black Disease. The older children will be expected to know whether their lamb has been drenched for worms, how often, what was used and whether it has been vaccinated for Scabby Mouth. All children should be able to explain about docking and what this means. They should be able to talk about their lambs with confidence, knowledge and to describe the strategies that they have used while rearing it.

### ***Condition***

This aspect of rearing involves the size for age and breed of lamb. The child should know what has been fed to their lamb, how much and how often. This aspect of rearing includes milk, grass, meal, hay, water and anything else the lamb has been fed.

### ***Cleanliness***

The lamb needs to be brushed daily. The wool should be kept clean and therefore a cover is recommended. See Daily Care of a Lamb, (page 5). It is especially important to keep the tail area clean as the longer this is left the worse it gets and the lamb can become very unpleasant to be with. A warm damp cloth may be used to clean the lamb's underbelly, ears, face, mouth, eyes, legs, hooves, and flanks for showing. After each feed wipe the lamb's mouth to avoid any build-up of dried milk. A well-reared lamb will be bright, clean, well grown and alert.

## ***Health Problems and Some Solutions for Lambs***

It has already been emphasised that a healthy lamb has the correct feed, clean bottles and teats, is given warm shelter and housed in clean conditions. However at times health problems do arise. Sometimes the child can take care of these but at times a professional such as a veterinarian (vet) is required. If a lamb does not respond to treatment immediately contact the vet as the lamb will have a better chance of recovering and the child will be happier.

A lamb that is refusing to feed may have scours (diarrhoea). This must be treated quickly to avoid dehydration and death. Use the following regime:

### **Scouring Lamb Regime**

- Feed one     replace milk with electrolytes (same as milk)
- Feed two     same as above
- Feed three   milk made from yoghurt (3/4 normal feed volume)
- Feed four    electrolyte mix
- Feed five    small feed of milk
- Feed six     electrolyte

If the lamb responds and is well, use yoghurt for three to four more feeds then begin the normal feeding regime. If in doubt contact your veterinarian.

As has already been mentioned there is also the Five in One vaccine that can be injected to prevent Pulpy Kidney, Tetanus, Blackleg, Malignant Oedema and Black Disease.