

Sheep and Goat Selection

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Over the past few months we have covered the topic of budgeting for your lamb or goat project. The time is fast approaching to begin purchasing show prospects so this month we will look at animal selection criteria that I think will help you in the decision making process.

First, let's look at age. Here is another reason its important to plan which shows you will be attending. If you will be showing at Ft. Worth you will probably want to look at a March born goat. For Houston you can slide that birthdate down to April or even May. There are other factors related to age that you may want to consider. Frame size is an important factor that you need to consider. A small frame goat is going to mature a little quicker and begin to put on fat earlier as well while a larger frame goat is going to develop bone and muscle for a longer period of time before adding finish. You will need to manage them quite differently. After you evaluate for frame size you will want to look at potential muscling. One good place to look is the forearm. Even on a "green" prospect, a bold forearm is hard to hide. Also look over the top. An animal that is a relatively wide between the shoulder blades has the potential to pack on the muscle as well. Also, look at the animal from the rear. The widest part of the leg should be in the stifle area. A wide chest floor on the front end of the lamb or goat is also a good indicator of future muscle development. Volume and capacity are important as well. Basically this is the relationship of body length to body depth and body width. Select for animals that have acceptable length from the last rib to rump as this is where most of your retail value is found. Also a relatively level topline is desirable. Generally lambs will be more flat from shoulder to dock. Market goats are made with just a little more slope from hooks to pins so levelness down the top is a relative term. Jumping back to structural correctness, look for a bold, erect head and a neck that extends out of the top of the shoulders. Avoid animals that have a low neck setting. Also make sure to look for an animal that is strong on its pasterns, with rear legs that are square from the rump to the hock to the ground. A lamb or goat should stand with feet straight and square. Toeing in or out should be selected against as well. After evaluating these points, look at the complete package. How does the animal blend all of its parts together? Is he attractive? Also observe the natural gate of the animal. While walking he should have a good length of stride with foot placement that matches his natural base width without stepping outside too far or toeing in. What is the animals growth potential? Look at the length of his cannon bone (front leg). Generally the longer that bone is in a young animal the more growth potential you can expect. Length of the head and neck are also good growth indicators as well. These evaluation tips are in no particular order as you will find out that when you begin the selection process you will need to consider them all as you make your decision. However, if I had to prioritize my selection criteria it would be as follows:

- 1) Natural base width
- 2) Structural correctness
- 3) Muscling

- 4) Volume and capacity
- 5) Style and balance
- 6) Growth potential

In the end, this will be your investment. We have talked about budgeting and planning and now selection criteria. Now you can build on that. Buy the best animal that best fits your budget and move into the next phase- nutrition. This will be the next section in our “Back to Basics” program so stay tuned.