

Central Washington Animal Agriculture Team



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Successfully Slick Shearing Show Lambs

Sarah M. Smith, Grant/Adams Area, WSU Cooperative Extension
Edited by Dr. Paul Kuber, University of Idaho

Many shows around the country require market lambs to be shown in a fleece no longer than one-fourth inch and uniform in length over the entire body, with the exception of the lower legs (below the hocks and knees) and the top of the head and face, which may be longer. The main reason for slick shearing is to place emphasis on conformation of the lamb. In addition, many judges prefer lambs to be “slick-shorn”, or shorn within three to four days of the show or during the show. “Slick shearing” lambs for show requires more than simply shearing them. These animals will be in the public eye and evaluated for market quality. For these reasons, it is important that lambs are “slick-sheared” uniformly without nicks or cuts.

Typical market lambs receiving adequate nutrition grow approximately one-third inch of wool per month. Therefore, to obtain a fleece of less than one-fourth inch, shear the lamb a week to ten (10) days before the show date. The rate of wool growth varies greatly upon the breed, the nutrition program, environmental temperature, and the individual lamb. On average, lambs of wool breed heritage grow wool at a faster

rate than meat breed sheep.

Steps to successfully slick shear a lamb for show:

- 1) To ensure a smooth shear job and more attractive lamb, shearers should use a pair of electric clippers fitted with a 20-tooth goat comb and 4-point cutters, 23-tooth comb and 9 point cutter, or the slick shearing clippers. The use of these clippers and blades will decrease the chance of nicking or cutting the lamb. Many youth can successfully use the 23-tooth blades or clippers with proper supervision.
- 2) Having the owner wash the lamb prior to shearing will allow the shearer to get a closer, smoother clip on the lamb. A close smooth shear job makes a lamb feel “tight hided” or firm to the touch.
- 3) Lambs should be positioned on a fitting stand in the typical show position, back of neck and shoulders should be at a 90° angle with feet positioned squarely under the lamb. It is critical to clip the lamb as it would stand in the show ring. This will help train the lamb, obtaining the desired overall balance, uniformity and eye appeal needed of a show lamb. (Diagram 1)

4) **Belly.** The belly may be sheared on the fitting stand or by positioning the lamb in the typical shearing position (on their rump). Keep the skin stretched to remove existing wrinkles. This will allow the shearer to obtain a smoother shear job and prevent nicking or cutting the lamb. Pay close attention not to cut or nick the sheath (penis), teats, or fore and rear flanks.

5) **Shoulder Region.** Begin shearing the body by making two upward shearing strokes from the base of the foreleg over the top of the shoulders. Depending upon the size of the lamb and clipper head more than two strokes may be required. Upward strokes will make the lamb look taller and trimmer.

6) **Neck Region.** The strokes on the neck should be lengthwise to emphasize the length and trimness of the lamb. To shear the region at the base of the neck and shoulders, remove lamb's head from the stand and hold the head down. Again pull the skin tight to obtain a smooth and uniform clip. The top-notch or wool on the top of the head in front of the poll should not be sheared on breeds that require wool for breed character. The long wool should be carded and trimmed to create uniformity and balance to the over-all appearance of the lamb.

7) **Body Region.** Start shearing the lamb's body by making a lengthwise pass down the back of the lamb over the spinal column. Continue shearing down the lambs body toward the belly with lengthwise strokes to make the lamb look longer, trimmer and more balanced. Keep the skin pulled tight to remove wrinkles and obtain a smoother shear job.

8) **Lower Back Legs** (above the

hock). When shearing the lower back legs use upward shearing strokes. This will help add definition to the hindquarter and lower leg. Leave the wool on the legs below the hocks and knees to create an impression of a heavy or thick boned lamb and to preserve breed character. Longer leg wool should be carded and trimmed to create an over-all appearance of balance.

Follow this same procedure to shear the other side of the lamb. The goal of slick-shearing show lambs is to enhance trimness, balance and over-all eye-appeal. Some people discredit slick shearing as a fitting technique, however just as much knowledge, design, and work must be invested to correctly slick-shear a lamb for show. With an adult present, the correct clipper set-up and some guidance many youth producers can successfully slick-shear a lamb. Remember to card and trim the wool on the lower legs and top-notch to successfully and correctly complete the slick-shearing process.

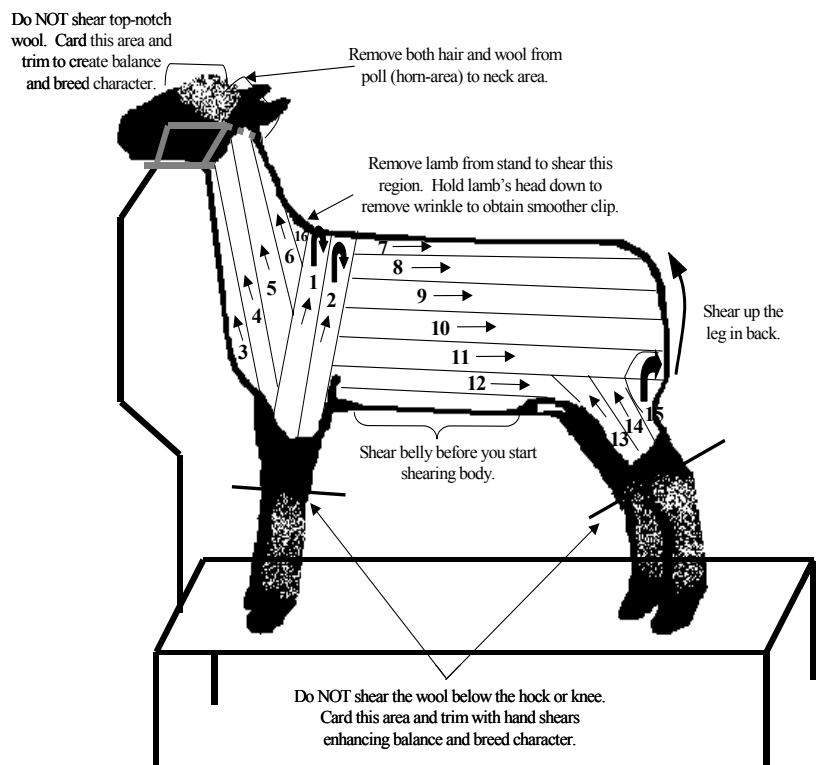


Diagram 1. Direction of slick shearing strokes.