**Feeders:** All feeders (grain, hay, salt, and mineral) should be built off the ground so the sheep cannot get their feet in them or lay in them. Feeding twice a day gives you the opportunity to more closely observe your sheep on an individual basis and to control intake so that your sheep do not get too fat.

**Water:** Clean water is a key factor for any sheep project. Water troughs should be small so they can be drained and cleaned each day. Water troughs should be located in the shade to keep water cool during the summer. On cold winter days break the ice and allow sheep to drink.

**Selection:**

The most common breeds shown in Texas are Rambouillet, Delaine-Merino, Columbia, Corriedale, Suffolk, Hampshire, Southdown, Dorset, Dorper, White Dorper, and Royal White. The selection of breeding sheep should include the following traits: structural correctness, growth, muscling, breed and sex character, fleece, and freedom from defects.

**Structural Correctness:** Structure generally refers to the skeletal makeup or bone structure of an animal and how it is put together. Generally, structure problems only get worse as the sheep gets older. Breeding sheep should travel and stand wide and straight on both their front and rear legs. The leg bones should be large, the pasterns should be short and strong, and the hooves should be correctly shaped and rest squarely on the ground. Do not select sheep that have a tendency to stand toed out on the front legs or hocked in or bow legged on the hind legs. Select breeding sheep whose necks come out of the top of a neat, clean set of shoulders, have a straight, strong top and level rump, and are wide at the pin bones. Open shouldered, U-necked, weak topped, steep rump sheep should be avoided.

**Muscling:** Generally, medium wool breeding sheep and many breeds of hair sheep are heavier muscled than wooled breeding sheep and more emphasis is placed on muscle when selecting medium wool and hair breeding sheep. However, muscle is extremely important in all three types. Muscle should be analyzed through the shoulder, down the top, and through the leg. Indicators of muscle in the shoulder are a prominent forearm, wide chest floor, and some expression of muscle throughout the shoulder. However, coarseness or an open shoulder is a sign of an early maturing sheep with a tendency to become fat quickly or sire lambs with more delivery problems at birth. The rack region behind the shoulder should be smooth and not break or dip and be a continuation of the natural muscling expressed in the shoulder. The loin and rump, which comprise the hindsaddle, should be as wide and long as possible. Since carcass traits are highly heritable, muscling of the hindsaddle is extremely important. The rump should also be level. The leg, the largest single region of muscling, should possess natural thickness and muscle expression through the top, center, and lower portion. The amount of muscle in the lower portion of the leg or stifle region of a young or thin lamb is a good indicator or muscling.

**Breed and Sex Character:** Breed character is important in selecting breeding sheep for show. Before buying or selecting breeding sheep, be well aware of what is acceptable breed character and what is not. Breed associations and/or registered breeders should be consulted before selecting sheep for a project. Ewes should be feminine, refined, and angular. Their heads should be long with a sharp look from eye to muzzle with a long pendulous ear in the larger breeds.

**Show wool:** Most major shows in Texas have shearing rules for wool breeding sheep which allow judges to more accurately evaluate fleeces. Be sure to read the rules and regulations of the shows you plan to attend so you will know when to shear your breeding sheep.

**Defects**

There are several defects which should be selected against. The wool defects of colored fiber, belly wool, wool blindness, and hairy britch. Other defects include wrinkles or skin folds, jaw defects, abnormal testicles, and inverted eyelids.

Wrinkles or skin folds are a problem with finewool breeding sheep but can be a problem with all sheep. Wrinkles create problems at shearing and negatively affect the appearance of a sheep. Generally speaking, smooth sheep shear less pounds of grease wool than wrinkled sheep but it is higher yielding and will result in approximately the same amount of clean wool.

Jaw defects are the failure of the incisor teeth (lower jaw) to properly meet the dental pad (upper jaw). This interferes with the ability of the animal to graze. In some, the lower jaw is shorter than the upper jaw and the teeth do not extend to the end of the pad. This condition is known as parrot mouth. In others, the lower jaw is longer than the upper jaw and the teeth extend beyond the pad. These animals should be culled.

Abnormal testicles refer to small or abnormal sized testicles and to the cryptorchid condition in which one or both testicles are retained in the abdominal cavity. Rams with abnormal testicles should be culled.

Inverted eyelids (entropion) is the condition in which either the upper or lower eyelid is turned in and causes irritation which eventually will lead to blindness if not treated. This condition can be corrected but since it is a heritable trait animals having this condition should be culled.

**Feed:**

**Protein:** Protein is the primary constituent of the body, therefore, protein from the diet serves to maintain or replace protein in body tissues, provides for carriers of other nutrients, and is a major component of various products such as meat, milk, and fiber. Protein requirements for breeding sheep vary according to size, age, sex, and stage and level of production. Young, fast-growing lambs need higher protein diets to allow them to grow and develop. Creep rations containing approximately 18% protein are useful during the first 2 to 3 months of life. It is important to remember that only natural protein sources should be used for young, growing lambs. Rations containing approximately 15% protein can be used during the growing phase.

After weaning or as soon as you buy your prospective show sheep, they should be put on a growing ration. A growing ration will be different from a creep ration in that it contains a much higher amount of bulky feed or roughage. However, it needs to be palatable, have enough protein, contain ammonium chloride, contain a proper mineral balance, and antibiotics, if necessary. A growing ration can be a complete feed containing cottonseed hulls or alfalfa pellets as a roughage source or can be a high quality hay with a grain supplement. A good growing ration should contain 14 to 16% protein.

**Health:**

**Enterotoxaemia or Overeating Disease:** One of the greatest causes of death in sheep is enterotoxaemia or overeating disease. The most common symptom or sign of enterotoxaemia is sudden death. This disease is caused by a clostridia organism which is normally present in the bowel of most sheep. Sheep which have their feeding schedule abruptly changed or take on large amounts of grain are the most subject to enterotoxaemia. These changes cause the clostridia organism to grow rapidly and produce a powerful toxin which causes death in a few hours. There are two types of enterotoxaemia, clostridium perfringens types C and D. Your breeding sheep should be vaccinated for enterotoxaemia when you get them with a vaccine that is a clostridium perfringens type C, D and tetanus toxoid combination.

**Soremouth:** Soremouth can be a nagging problem for breeding sheep. This contagious disease causes the formation of scabs on the lips and around the mouth of sheep. This is a virus which can affect humans so care should be exercised when working with sheep with sore mouth. Few medicines help in the treatment of sore mouth. Iodine can be rubbed into the lesions after the scabs are removed and this will help to dry up the area and reduce the infection. The Texas Agricultural Experiment Station in Sonora manufactures an excellent soremouth vaccine. This vaccine contains many strains of the organism and will help to prevent sheep from having soremouth just prior to or during a show. The vaccine is a live virus and is applied to a small scratched area of the sheep where a scab is developed and the sheep develops immunity against further inoculations.

**Internal Parasites:** Internal parasites are a continual problem in a breeding sheep program. When you first get your breeding sheep they should immediately be drenched for internal parasites and a second drenching should follow about three weeks later. **(ONLY IF INSTRUCTED BY YOUR AG TEACHER AND/OR BREEDER)** There are not many approved drenches for internal parasites in sheep. You should consult a veterinarian or Extension agent in your area for recommendations on products that are effective and on the time to administer. Internal parasites tend to build up a resistance to a drench if it is used over a long period of time. Rotating drenches may be effective in helping eliminate internal parasite problems.

**Hoof Trimming:** When sheep are confined to pens and fed well their hooves grow long and need to be trimmed often. Abnormal hoof growth can lead to problems with feet and leg structure and movement of sheep. Hooves need to be trimmed about every month or two. Always trim hooves one to two weeks before a show in case you should cut into the quick and temporarily cripple the sheep. This will give the sheep time to get well before the show.

**Shearing:** Breeding sheep need to be sheared after you get them as they will grow faster and more efficiently if sheared. Ideal shearing dates are after you get them in the summer and again on a date that works with shows. This enables you to evaluate the progress and growth of your sheep. Remember, in Texas, most major shows have a shearing date in their show rules for wool breeding sheep. Some shows also have a shearing rule for medium wool breeding sheep. Check each set of show rules as to shearing dates and rules.

**Observation:** Careful observation of sheep on a daily basis is also a good preventative measure for a successful health program. Sheep which are not feeling good will generally not eat as quickly and may not clean up their feed. It is a good idea to routinely check the manure. Sheep with diarrhea generally have some type of problem. They have either had their feed changed too quickly, have consumed too much high energy feed, or they may have an internal parasite problem. Check sheep to see how they walk and to get a good impression of their overall thriftiness. Sheep with their ears hanging down and walking abnormally generally do not feel well. Watch your sheep continually and develop a preventative health program which will allow you the confidence of knowing that you have given your sheep adequate protection from those things which most often cause disease problems. Sheep which appear sick should receive treatment immediately to prevent more severe disease and health problems from occurring.

**Showing:**

Showing is a very important segment of the breeding sheep program. It takes a great amount of work, time, and practice at home. Practice is very essential. Practice showing a little every day, especially 30 days prior to your first show.

The first step in showing is to halter break your sheep. Once the halter is on tie the sheep to the fence with his head high and as close as possible. This needs to be done every day for a week to 10 days. Care should be taken not to tie them where they can hurt themselves and you should not go off and leave them tied in case a sheep gets tangled or chokes.

The next step is to teach you sheep to stand. While sheep are tied to the fence you can begin to place their feet properly and get them accustomed to setting up for show. After your sheep has gentled down, remove the halter, take hold on both sides of the jaw with your hands and hold the sheep. Reach down with one hand and place the back feet squarely under the animal. Be sure the animal is standing in a normal position, not too stretched out and not too close. Next, press gently down on the jaw and/or neck so the animal will push slightly against you. This will tighten the muscles along the back and leg giving the judge a better handle on your sheep.

The third and final step is to teach your sheep to travel at your side. Stand up with the sheep’s head and neck in the normal up position. Place one hand under the throat close to the jaw bone. Place the other hand at the dock to push him. By doing this repeatedly your sheep will learn to lead properly. Keep the animals head high and the front and back legs straight at all times. When you enter the show ring always be clean and neat. Stay alert and watch the judge at all times. You will, from time to time, be caught in tight positions. Always remember that good sportsmanship and courtesy are very important when you are at the show and in the show ring.