

LAMB GRADING AND EVALUATION

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When evaluating live lambs for their potential slaughter grade, the most important factor is determining the amount of finish (fat thickness) a lamb has. We move our fingers back and forth across the lamb's backbone and ribs to determine if the lamb has enough fat cover to grade Choice (minimum is about .07 inch). The preferred area to evaluate fat thickness is in the middle of the back. With your finger find the last rib, then place your thumb on the lamb's backbone at this mid-point of the body. Now move your fingers forward and while applying moderate pressure, move your fingers across the ribs and your thumb across the backbone to determine fat thickness. It's important to use the tips of your fingers to penetrate the wool. With practice and follow-up you can become fairly accurate at estimating fat thickness. To give you some idea of what various amounts of fat thickness may feel like, try the following exercise. Make a tight fist with one hand. Now rub the index finger of the other hand across the back of your hand. If a lamb is this smooth, it is too fat. (Yield Grade 4 or 5). Now rub the index finger across the row of knuckles. This is what a lamb's backbone will feel like if it does not have enough finish. Now rub your finger across the row of the first joints of your fingers. This is what adequate finish would feel like on a lamb - approximately .1 - .25 inch of fat thickness.

USDA Choice is the preferred slaughter grade. There are no premiums for Prime lambs (as there are for Prime cattle) and Prime lambs are usually too fat.

USDA LAMB STANDARDS

USDA Quality Grades for slaughter lambs are:

PRIME, CHOICE, GOOD, UTILITY

The two factors that influence quality grades are:

Conformation - thickness of muscling

Quality - amount and distribution of fat, maturity

To be eligible for Choice or Prime, lambs must have a minimum of about .07 inch covering of fat.

USDA YIELD GRADES

Fat Thickness Plus .04 Times 10 = Final Yield Grade

(Example) .15 plus .04 * 10 = 1.9 yield grade

Y.G. 1	0.00 - .15 INCH
Y.G. 2	.16 - .25 INCH
Y.G. 3	.26 - .35 INCH
Y.G. 4	.36 - .45 INCH

FEEDER LAMB STANDARDS:

FRAME SIZE	EXPECTED SLAUGHTER WEIGHT AT OR ABOUT .2 IN. FAT
SMALL FRAME	100 LBS. AND DOWN
MEDIUM FRAME	100 - 120 LBS.
LARGE FRAME	OVER 120 LBS.

MUSCLING SPECIFICATIONS FOR FEEDER LAMBS

No. 1 Thrifty animals that are thick throughout. Lambs that are thick and full in the forearm and leg, showing a rounded appearance through the back and loin. Lambs which are wide between the legs, both front and rear.

No. 2 Lambs that are thrifty and are slightly thick through the forequarter and the middle part of the leg. The forearm and leg are slightly thick and the back and loin have a slightly thick appearance. The legs are set slightly wide, both front and rear.

No. 3 Feeder lambs included here are thrifty animals which have less thickness than the minimum requirements specified for the No. 2

Inferior: Animals that are unthrifty.

VIRGINIA LAMB GRADING SPECIFICATIONS

Lambs with a blue mark will be expected to grade USDA Choice or Prime and a red mark will indicate a feeder lamb or USDA Good grade slaughter lamb.

Lambs must have a minimum of about .07 inch backfat to grade Choice or Prime.

BLUE O LAMB: Choice, Few Prime, Yield Grade 1 2, Few 3
May be sorted into different weight groups;
90-100 lbs., 100-125 lbs., 125 lbs. and up

DOUBLE BLUE O LAMB: Choice & Prime, Yield Grade 3-4
Weighing 130 lbs and up

RAM LAMBS: Will be marked with a blue mark on the rump in addition to slaughter grade mark.

RED O LAMB: Heavy feeder lamb, or Good and Low Choice lamb weighing 85-100 lbs.

RED SHOULDER: Large and medium framed feeder lambs weighing 70-85 lbs. expected to finish at 100 lbs and up.

BLUE SHOULDER: Small framed feeder lambs weighing 70-85 lbs, expected to finish at less that 100 lbs. Many of these lambs may have enough fat thickness to grade Choice.

RED BACK: Large and Medium framed feeder lambs weighing 60-70 lbs., expected to finish at 100 lbs and up.

BLUE BACK: Small framed feeder lambs weighing 60-70 lbs. Expected to finish at less that 100 lbs.

RED TAIL: Large and Medium framed feeder lambs weighing 50-60 lbs. expected to finish at 100 lbs. and up.

BLUE TAIL: Small framed feeder lambs weighing less than 60 lbs. expected to finish at less that 100 lbs.

Ram lambs will be marked with red mark on the rump, in addition to feeder classification, i.e. Red Shoulder Buck Lambs.