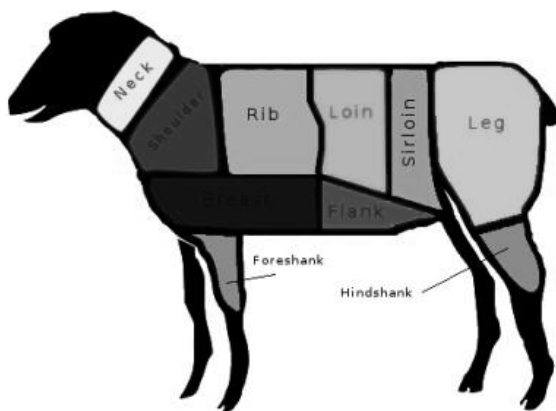Judging Sheep

When judging sheep, the animals in the class should be ranked based on the traits of importance they possess, while putting the greatest emphasis on the most valuable traits in the production of sheep. Judging is the art of visually comparing and ranking sheep.

Live animal appraisal techniques are used in the show ring, feedlot, pasture and auction sale to assess the quality of our sheep.

There are two indifferent aspects to sheep judging which are animals chosen for reproduction and longevity and carcass or market lamb judging which are chosen for their curability (the animal's ability to produce a high yielding carcass that consumers will eventually purchase at the grocery store or through farm gate sales)

One of the most confusing thing about judging sheep is the terms the judges uses to describe why he or she has chosen one animal over another. It is difficult to define the meanings of these terms, since they have different meanings to different people. Some of the common ones will be outlined here:

In purebred animals the judge will be looking for overall conformation (the entire animal as a whole and its balance and proportion, structural soundness (having strong feet and legs and strong bone structure) and breed character (certain traits are often more profound and common in specific breeds) In purebred sheep, the judge needs to see an animal who is strong enough to live a long life, and who carries the positive genetic traits of its breed to pass on to its offspring.

Conformation: the overall structure of the animal, the balance and proportion of its characteristics.

Masculinity: a term used to describe rams, massiveness and strength of the animal, defined muscle, thickness throughout the shoulder, neck and crest area, overall well developed muscle mass, heavy bone structure and well developed bone structure.

Femininity: a term used to describe ewes , refined head , neck and shoulders, the degree of muscling, evidence of udder and teat development. Females should have smoother but ample muscle development than rams and should have a more refined front end and smaller bone structure.

Breed Character: any trait that is specific to a breed like head shape, body length, muscle mass, wool length and placement, colouring height, etc.

Condition: the amount of fat the animal is carrying.
Broodiness: indicators that a female will be or is a good mother, such as udder and teat size or development, adequate size and frame to carry lambs.

Capacity: the column or depth of the animals stomach region as viewed from the side. Must be adequate but proportioned to the animals overall body size.

Progeny: the offspring (lambs) of a ewe and rma. Progeny should improve upon their dams and sires faults, but carry their good traits.

Spring of Rib: a term used to describe the "barrel" or stomach of the animal from it's hips to shoulders. The barrel should be rounded and not flat.

Loin: a term used to describe the region across the top of the back,, just in front of the hips. This si where the prime cuts come from, therefore the larger and wider the better.

Hind quarter: a term used to describe the muscle mass on the back leg of the animal, muscle should be rounded and not flat and carry well down the leg toward the hock. This is where many choice cuts of meat come from.

There are many factors that play into a judge's decision as to who gets the first place ribbon. A judge is looking for an attractive animal who carries as many of the traits above well and as few of the flaws as possible. These flaws separate first from the last and even the tiniest flaw can make an animal second place.