



SHOW SOLUTIONS

5 steps to breaking and training your show lamb

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Chastin Leggett is from Moore, Oklahoma. He is the founder and CEO of You Gotta Believe (YGB) Livestock Camps. He has coached showmen to win championship titles at every major stock show in the U.S. and at state fairs from coast to coast. He started YGB with 12 kids, and it has grown to include more than 1,600 kids nationally, with over 30 locations. Chastin loves traveling, corgis and Dr. Pepper.

Step 1. “The old bucket and radio”

Getting new lambs can be extremely exciting, but just like your first day of school, it can also be scary to be in a new atmosphere with new friends! I suggest giving your lambs three to five days to settle into their new surroundings. This period is also a great time to get yourself back in the habit of proper care by setting routine feeding times, keeping their water buckets fresh and staying on top of clean bedding. I know you won't be able to stand leaving your new best friends alone, so grab an old bucket and have a seat in their pens a few times a day. Do not approach them; rather, let them come to you and settle in on their own. Eventually, their curiosities will get the best of them, and they will start approaching you — and you will earn their trust. I've seen kids take this time to get their school reading assignments done and to read to their animals. I suggest always having a radio playing quietly in your barn; I, for one, always use this time to introduce the animals to the sounds of Dolly, early 2000s country and some “Jesus jams.”

Step 2. Safely catching your lamb

There are three big mistakes you can make when training your lamb. The first one is chasing them around to try to catch them. We've all been there, but this should never happen, as chasing your lambs will instill fear in the animal. Fear completely defeats the purpose of Step 1 and destroys the trust you built with your lamb. It is important that you build a catch pen in one corner of your animal's pen. This can be as simple as putting up an extra panel that you use to catch the animal. Simply use the panel to divide the pen into a smaller area, calmly move the lambs into that area and, then, catch your lamb without chasing and instilling fear in them.

Step 3. The halter — patience required!

Our first instinct is to put the halter on the animal and pull on it to make the animal walk. This is the second-biggest mistake you can make during the breaking and training process — and it will eventually haunt you when you try to teach your animal to brace.

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First, make sure you put the halter on the animal properly. The lead should be on the left side of the lamb's face and should pull under the animal's chin. Next, tie the animal to a secure fence and let them get used to the halter on their own. It is very important to remember, though, that you should never leave a lamb tied to a fence without supervision. During this process, you should also have a sharp object on-hand to cut the rope in case the lamb becomes entangled. This is a very rare occurrence, but every precaution should be taken to protect the welfare of the lamb. I suggest leaving the lambs tied for 15 minutes the first time. (Here's another chance to introduce them to Dolly or some "Jesus jams"!) After the time is up, simply untie your lambs and let them relax. Repeat this process five or six times over a two- or three-day period. While the lambs are tied, take that time to pet them so they can get used to human interaction.

Step 4. Proceed to lead

After several days of allowing the lamb to acclimate to its halter, it is now time to start leading the lamb. Use your catch pen to safely halter your lamb, and then tie it up for a few minutes. Next, you may begin to lead your lamb. Once again, you will feel the urge to untie your animal and start dragging it — but you must resist this urge! Gently pull on your lamb for a few seconds, then release; repeat this step several times. Doing this prevents the "show-lamb flop" or "the stand-off." We have all seen lambs flop onto their bellies, flip over backward or lock their front legs for the "stand-off"! Gently pulling and releasing, however, will allow the animal to get used to the pressure and not feel the need to enter into a "stand-off" with you. After applying gentle pressure a few times, you can then apply steady pressure, which will require them to take a few steps. Once they've taken a few steps, release the pressure and let them relax. Repeat this step again and again, asking them every time to go just a few steps further. Before you know it, you'll be walking them to the mailbox and back with no problems at all.

5. Better bracing

The final step to training your lamb is vital to show-ring success. The third-biggest mistake of training a show lamb happens during Step 5; this is the mistake that could ruin your lamb's brace for good. Most people grab the lamb and pull on the animal's head and neck. They tug the animal's head forward to meet their brace leg. Instead of making this mistake, take your body to the animal and push onto the animal. This encourages the lamb to brace into you rather than pulling back. Tugging on that lamb's head will prevent him from ever bracing for you properly! If possible, set the lamb's feet before pushing into the lamb. If you cannot reach the lamb's back legs, simply push on the front of the lamb with steady pressure until they set their legs. After their legs are set, just continue to apply pressure to the lamb's front with your legs, which will keep the lamb bracing steadily against you.

I hope you find these tips helpful while breaking this year's show string. Once your animals are trained and ready to go, we would love to have you attend Leggett's You Gotta Believe (YGB) Livestock Camp to perfect your showmanship skills.

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