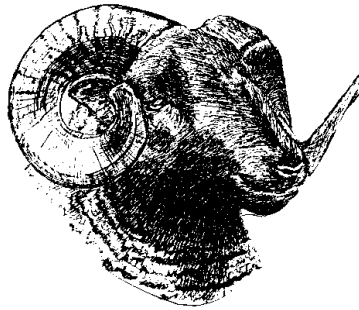


THE NORFOLK HORN BREEDERS' GROUP



GUIDELINES ON SELECTING NORFOLK HORN SHEEP FOR BREEDING, SHOWING, SALES AND FATTENING

**By Laura Stephen BVSc MRCVS, Isle Vet Group
Laura and her husband, Iain, own the Wretton flock.**

This guideline has been written to assist breeders in deciding the destination for their sheep. It is not an exhaustive list, and breeders are also encouraged to seek advice from fellow Norfolk Horn members and the Norfolk Horn Breeders' Group (NHBG) committee. The NHBG are delighted that so many people now keep Norfolk Horn sheep, and we wish to promote good health and welfare for the benefit of the sheep and their owners.

Selecting Breeding Sheep – for retention in your flock, selling for breeding or for showing

A breeding sheep must predominantly be a sound animal, while displaying the characteristics of a Norfolk Horn. If a sheep does not display the following attributes of good health and conformation, consideration should be given to fattening it. It is no benefit to the future of your flock to keep sheep which are not sound animals.

Ewes/Ewe Lambs

Body condition – ewes should be palpated over the ribs, loin and tail head to assess condition. Feel through the fleece to assess the fat/muscle cover over the bones. Very thin ewes warrant further investigation (check teeth, worming history, disease status etc) and extra food/removal from the flock. There is no benefit in tugging a very thin ewe. Very thin animals should not be brought to shows/breed sales. Mature adult ewe 70-75kg. Long in leg and body, forequarters narrow, relatively fine head with a long straight profile and should be alert and active.

Teeth - Incisors should meet the dental pad – not over/undershot. There should be 8 incisors. Consider how emerging adult incisors will mature.

Molars – no gaps, arcades (the rows of teeth in the upper and lower jaws) should be even not uneven – check along the jaw for lumps. In cases of doubt, shine a torch into the mouth (careful your fingers don't get bitten!) and check the arcades.

Nose and mouth – free of ulcers/wounds/warts. Nose clean, free of discharge. Animals with a yellow nasal discharge or any warts/ulcers/scabs around nose/mouth should not be presented at breed sales or shows as they may have a contagious disease (eg Orf).

Eyes – no discharge, both eyes equally open with lashes pointing horizontally, clear eye surface.

Horns – open curl, horns should not curve back to touch neck. May flick out at ends. Colour based on personal preference – white/black acceptable.

Skin – covered with (ideally black, dark brown acceptable) hair on face and legs. Face and legs should be free from wool. Some white mottling where black face joins fleece at cheeks and throat acceptable.

Fleece – should cover the whole body. Bare patches may indicate fly strike (check for maggots), scab (mites, very itchy and contagious – seek veterinary advice) or a previous illness (a temperature can cause fleece loss). Ideally

white fibres with a tight crimp, some black fibres permissible. Note wool turns black after previous skin injury (eg fly strike). Sheep with bare patches in the fleece should not be brought to breed sales/shows.

Udder/teats – should be one teat on each side of the udder. Udder should be even and not lumpy. Uneven, lumpy udders suggest previous/active mastitis – these sheep should not be presented at shows or breed sales or sold for breeding.

Tail – the skin of the dock should cover the lower part of the vulva as a minimum.

Feet – should be even and not deformed/overgrown. There should be no lameness on any leg. Feet should be inspected for scald (soreness between the toes), footrot (sole separation with discharge, pain and smell) and CODD (sole, wall and coronary band separation with discharge, pain and smell), all of which are contagious and cause lameness. These conditions should be treated appropriately and measures to prevent them incorporated into your flock health plan.

Legs and movement – legs should be straight and upright – not leaning back on pasterns. Joints even, not swollen (always compare to the other leg if unsure). Movement should be free, even and straight. Lamé animals should not be brought to shows/breed sales. Sheep MUST be able to bear weight on all four legs to travel, even to slaughter. If you are in any doubt whatsoever, contact a vet as to whether an animal is fit to transport.

Rams/Ram Lambs

Body condition – as ewes. Mature adult ram 90-95kg. Long in leg and body, forequarters narrow, relatively fine head with a long straight profile and alert and active.

Teeth - as ewes

Nose and mouth - as ewes

Eyes - as ewes

Horns – strong horns with open spiral. Horns must not touch side of neck. Ideally should be able to get a fist between horn and side of face. Ideally horns should not touch in the middle at their base. Colour based on personal preference – white/black acceptable.

Skin – as ewes. Check the brisket of rams; some will develop skin wounds on their brisket which is undesirable.

Fleece – as ewes

Scrotum/Testicles – should be a good size and equal. Each testicle should move freely in the scrotum and be firm to palpate (like a juicy plum!). Soft, lumpy or uneven testicles are a fault and the ram should not be kept for breeding and should not be presented at a breed sale or show. Some rams have testicular hernias; this is where some of the abdominal fat +/- intestines enters the sac around the testis. This looks like an enlarged, soft testicle. In early cases the ram is fine to travel to a fat market/slaughter; if the hernia becomes severe or the ram becomes ill (may happen if the hernia contains intestines which twist) then euthanasia may be necessary on welfare grounds. If you are in any doubt about whether the ram is fit to travel, contact your vet.

Prepuce (foreskin) – should be free of warts and discharge.

Tail – skin of dock must cover the anus as a minimum. Tails shorter than this may render the animal unfit for slaughter for human consumption.

Feet – as ewes.

Legs and Movement – as ewes. Movement/conformation of ram's hind legs is especially important as he needs to mount the ewes comfortably.