Buying a Lamb, Goat, Or Hog for Fair?

It’s often hard to tell what you should look for when buying a young lamb, goat, or hog. You may know what a good one looks like at county fair, but how can you tell when the animals are still small? In general, the same factors, muscle, balance, structural correctness, and eye appeal, apply to young animals as they do to market ready animals. Consider growth potential for the animal. Don’t pick an animal just because it’s the biggest, the smallest, or the cutest. Some animals may have already done most of their growing and may have problems making the minimum daily rate of gain for fair. Others will grow too slowly and will have problems making the minimum required weights at fair. Many “cute” baby animals grow up to be unattractive adults. Color or breed should only be a consideration if all other points are equal.

Lambs & Goats: Muscle can be found through the back (loin), chest, forearm, and hindquarters. The animal should stand wide and square when viewed from the front and the rear. The back should be level, and not sag. Does the animal have three equal parts: front, middle, and hind? The neck should be long and thin, and connect smoothly to the chest. A short-legged, short-necked animal will often be short in body. Does the animal walk well (straight, with legs well apart and without signs of weak pasterns or limping)? Last consider eye appeal. Does the animal look attractive? Also, be sure the animal has their scrapie ear tag.

Hogs: Look for an animal that will grow lots of muscle without becoming too fat. Muscle can be found throughout the top and hindquarters. Young hogs should be wide when viewed from the front and the rear. The pig’s hams should be wide and long. When looking down the animal’s back (from the rear) you should be able to see a dimple at the tail head, and a “groove” from the shoulders to the hip (along the backbone), which indicates leanness and a full loin. It should be long bodied and level backed, with a lean neck and jowls. The animal should be able to walk well without a rounded back, or look awkward or stiff when moving.