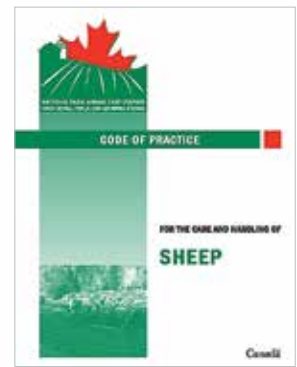


ALBERTA SheepSmart

RESOURCES FOR PRODUCERS

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Animal Welfare Considerations for Castration and Tail Docking

WELFARE RISK VERSUS BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Procedures commonly used in Canadian flocks, including tail docking and castration, need to be carefully managed to maintain a high level of animal welfare. These procedures must only be performed after balancing the benefits to animal welfare against the risks. Animals do experience some short-term discomfort and there is the chance for complications, such as infection. However, there are many long-term welfare benefits, such as a lower occurrence of flystrike in tail-docked sheep and lower risk of unwanted pregnancies when ram lambs are castrated. If you determine that the benefits outweigh the risks and the procedure is performed, every effort must be made to minimize welfare concerns. Maintaining a high level of welfare when castrating and tail docking helps your lambs recover more quickly with less disruption in growth. Complete details regarding castration, tail docking and other management procedures are available in *The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Sheep**. Use the Code of Practice and work with your veterinarian to build animal welfare considerations into your flock management.

Options for Tail Docking Lambs (for full details see the Code of Practice*)

No Docking	When deciding whether tail docking is necessary consider: the risk of flystrike in your area; flock management (e.g. diet can affect tail soiling); the possibility of docking only replacement stock; the natural tail length of your breed of sheep.
Hot Iron	An electric docking iron that cauterizes blood vessels as the tail is cut. Studies indicate lambs may experience a relatively lower level of pain with this method. Recommended for use when possible.
Rubber Ring	Rings are applied using an elastrator tool. It is highly recommended that rings be applied between 24 hours and seven days of age. Rings must not be applied to lambs over six weeks of age.
Rubber Ring Combined with Clamp	A clamp (burdizzo) is applied across the tail immediately below (distal to) the ring. Studies indicate there may be a reduction in discomfort compared to using only rubber rings.
Crush and Cut	An emasculator or burdizzo crushes the blood vessels to prevent bleeding before cutting the tail below the seal. It is important to apply for long enough to prevent bleeding.
Surgical (cutting only)	A veterinarian must perform this method with appropriate pain medication.
For All Options	Tail docking must only be performed by, or under the direct supervision of, competent personnel using proper, clean, sanitized and well-maintained tools and accepted techniques. Docking of lambs over six weeks of age must be performed by a veterinarian with appropriate pain medication. Tails must be docked no shorter than the distal end of the caudal fold (Figure 1). Monitor lambs for, and treat any, post-operative complications.



Figure 1: Proper docking length. Docking too close to the body increases the risk of prolapse.

PAIN MEDICATION

Pain medication reduces the impact of castration and tail docking on welfare and should be used when possible. Drugs to manage pain in sheep are available in Canada. Although recommended for all ages, the use of medication is considered required when tail docking and castrating older animals. Work with your veterinarian to establish an appropriate pain medication plan for your flock.

Options for Castrating Lambs (for full details see the Code of Practice*)

No Castration	Possible in management systems where rams are weaned early, reared separately, marketed prior to puberty, and/or are not sold to feedlots. Management must prevent unwanted pregnancies.
Rubber Ring (confinement and semi-confinement systems)	Recommended to be performed between 24 hours and seven days of age. Must be performed before lambs are 10 days of age (varies from pasture lambing requirements due to a greater potential for infection).
Rubber Ring (pasture lambing system)	Recommended to be performed between 24 hours and seven days of age. Must be performed before lambs are six weeks of age.
Surgical	Must be performed between 24 hours and four weeks of age (if not using pain medication). If performing after four weeks of age, appropriate pain medication is required - consult with your veterinarian. Studies suggest this method causes more pain and distress than others.
Burdizzo (clamp)	Must be performed between one week and six weeks of age (if not using pain medication). If performing after six weeks of age, appropriate pain medication is required - consult with your veterinarian. Studies indicate this method may cause less pain than other methods.
For All Options	Rams castrated at an early age heal faster and show less disruption in growth - do not perform before 24 hours of age, to allow for recovery and bonding with ewe after birth. Castration of lambs older than 10 weeks of age must be done by a veterinarian with appropriate pain medication. Castration must only be performed by, or under the direct supervision of, competent personnel and using proper, clean, sanitized and well-maintained tools and accepted techniques. Monitor lambs for, and treat any, post-operative complications. Short scrotum castration must not be practiced. Maintain an ewe vaccination program.

*Code of Practice details the legal requirements and industry accepted standards for responsible animal care on sheep farms in Canada. The Code is available for download from www.nfacc.ca or by contacting the ALP office.

For more information about Alberta's sheep industry visit www.ablamb.ca, www.youtube.com/SheepCentralAlberta or contact the Alberta Lamb Producers office (403-948-8533 or info@ablamb.ca)

Figure 2: Castrating using a rubber ring.

Photo Credit: Thagedorn

