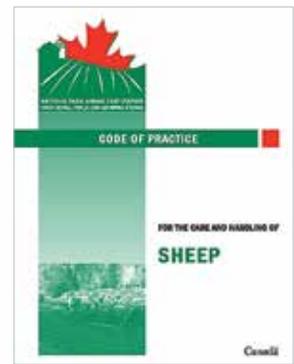


ALBERTA SheepSmart

RESOURCES FOR PRODUCERS

Photo: THagedorn, AARD



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 should be performed only after balancing the benefits to animal welfare against the risks. These procedures do cause short-term pain and there is the chance for complications, such as infections. However, they also have many long-term benefits. For example, tail docking reduces manure build up on wool, lowering the occurrence of flystrike, and castration decreases injuries due to aggressive behaviour in rams. If the benefits out-weigh the risks and the procedure is performed, every effort must be made to minimize welfare concerns. 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 plans. A high level of welfare will help your lambs recover more quickly with less disruption in growth.

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), docking only replacement stock, 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



www.ablamb.ca
403.948.8533

PAIN MEDICATION

Pain relief reduces the impact of castration and tail docking on welfare and should be used when possible. Drugs to manage pain exist for livestock, but in Canada they are not registered for use in sheep. As with all extra-label drug uses, it is necessary to have a prescription from your veterinarian for these medications. Although recommended for all procedures, the use of medication is required for tail docking and castrating of 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.
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.
Surgical (cutting only)	A veterinarian must perform this method with appropriate pain medication.
For All Options	<p>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).</p> <p>Castration of lambs older than 10 weeks of age must be done by a veterinarian with appropriate pain medication.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Monitor lambs for, and treat any, post-operative complications.</p> <p>Short scrotum castration must not be practiced.</p>

ESTABLISHING WELFARE RECOMMENDATIONS

To develop animal welfare recommendations, the degree of discomfort an animal is experiencing is determined by measuring behavioural signs, such as restlessness, vocalization, abnormal posture, and lateral recumbency (lying flat). Some studies measure other indicators of stress, such as levels of the hormone cortisol. Analyses of these measures help determine which procedures are more humane.

* 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/pdfs/codes/sheep_code_of_practice.pdf. For those without Internet access, contact the ALP office at 403-948-8533.

Growing Forward 2 can provide financial support to producers making improvements to animal welfare on their farms. Visit www.growingforward.alberta.ca or call the Alberta AgInfo line at 310-FARM for more information about producer grants.

For more information about Alberta's sheep industry visit www.ablamb.ca, www.youtube.com/SheepCentralAlberta or contact the ALP office.

