

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE
Cornell Sheep Flock
TAIL DOCKING

Justification: Tails are docked on lambs to avoid fecal accumulation on the hindquarters that would predispose to flystrike (infestation with fly maggots).

Age: Lambs are docked between two days and two weeks of age unless they are not healthy at this time. Docking of unthrifty lambs may be postponed until as long as 4 weeks of age if necessary. Beyond this age involvement by the flock veterinarian will be requested.

Restraint: The lamb is manually restrained by holding two legs together in each hand, with the lamb's head up and the tail directed towards the operator.

Technique: The tail is docked at the distal end of the caudal tail fold, clearly visible on the ventral surface of the tail, to insure adequate coverage of the perineum and sparing of the nerves to this area. Very short tail docks are associated with an increased incidence of rectal and vaginal prolapses.

Four different techniques may be used, according to the preferences of the herd manager.

1. Application of an elastrator band at the level of the distal end of the caudal tail fold.
2. Crushing the tail with a Burdizzo emasculatome at the same location. The Burdizzo is left in place for one minute and the tail distal to the crush is amputated with a clean scalpel or sharp knife. The scalpel or knife will be placed into a disinfectant solution of chlorhexidine (1 ounce = 2 Tablespoons = 30 cc of 2% chlorhexidine gluconate in 1 gallon of clean tap water) between lambs.
3. Application of an equine emasculator at the same location, with the nut of the emasculator on the side towards the tip of the tail to produce a crush proximal to the cutting blade.
4. The instrument is left in place for 1 minute. The instrument is then rinsed and placed into a disinfectant solution of chlorhexidine (1 ounce = 2 Tablespoons = 30 cc of 2% chlorhexidine gluconate in 1 gallon of clean tap water) between lambs, and thoroughly scrubbed and sanitized at the end of the docking session.
5. Application of an electric hot docker, from the ventral surface of the tail. The instrument is initially closed slowly to permit cauterization of the blood vessels on the ventral midline, then more rapidly to sever the vertebrae and remaining skin.

Tetanus prevention: If lambs did not consume colostrum from ewes receiving a booster vaccination against tetanus and enterotoxemia during pregnancy or cow colostrum from the T&R Dairy (where all cows are vaccinated with Covexin-8), they shall be given 250 IU of tetanus antitoxin subcutaneously at the time of docking.

Aftercare: Open wounds (from use of Burdizzo or emasculator) are sprayed with scarletol or red oil spray after docking. Animal that bleed after docking will be managed by tying an overhand knot with string or gauze around the tail stump just tightly enough to stop hemorrhage. This ligature will be removed within 24 hours. If this treatment is inadequate, a veterinarian will be consulted.

Animals that develop swelling of the tail stub or lethargy or other signs of infection will receive 0.5 cc (if under 10 pounds) to 1 cc (if over 10 pounds) of procaine penicillin G subcutaneously daily for 3 days. A slaughter withhold of 28 days will be observed.



Figure A: Caudal tail folds as seen from the ventral surface of the tail.



Figure B: Elastrator band in proper place for docking.



Figure C: Tail docked with a hot docker

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