

# UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Extension Division

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CIRCULAR NO. 85

(Revised)

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## DOCKING AND CASTRATING LAMBS



Properly docked lambs from a Kentucky purebred flock.

Lexington, Ky.

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“Trimming” is necessary to maintain and improve the quality of Kentucky lambs. The operations of castrating and docking are simple and all sheep raisers should know how to perform them. They have been taught to thousands of sheep raisers in demonstrations thruout the state. If you do not know how to perform these operations, you doubtless have a neighbor who does. If not, it will be easy to arrange with your County Farm Agent for a demonstration at which you and your neighbors can learn how to do the work.

## CIRCULAR NO. 85

(Revised)

### Docking and Castrating Lambs

By RICHARD C. MILLER

“Bucky” and long-tailed lambs continue to be a problem in Kentucky. Annually thousands of lambs are placed in the lower grades that would have been considered prime or choice had they been castrated when young. The object of this circular is to show the importance of castrating and docking lambs and to describe the best methods of performing these operations.

#### REASONS FOR CASTRATING

1. The carcass of a wether lamb is better developed than that of a ram lamb because the flesh is better distributed on the parts which give the high-priced cuts, such as leg and loin, whereas ram lambs are developed more in the neck and shoulders.

2. Ram lambs become nervous and discontented and begin at an early age to annoy the ewe lambs. Even a few large ram lambs in a flock make the whole flock restless.

3. Packer buyers prefer wether and ewe lambs to a mixed lot containing some rams. Ram lambs sent to market with ewe and wether lambs generally are put into a lower grade and sold at a decided discount. The ram lambs are worth less to the packer, hence he pays less for them. On many of the terminal markets ram lambs are discounted at \$1 per hundredweight and this does not take into consideration the large percentage of ram lambs that go into the lower grades.

4. The meat from large ram lambs is not nearly so appetizing as that from wether and ewe lambs. The consumer who happens to get a cut from a large ram lamb may thereby become prejudiced against lamb meat and discontinue the purchase of lamb of any kind, thus lowering the demand for lamb.

5. To castrate every ram lamb except good purebreds is the best way to make sure that ewes will not be bred to "scrub" rams.

#### DIRECTIONS FOR CASTRATING

Every ram lamb except purebreds of desirable quality should be castrated. The operation is simple and any farmer who follows directions carefully should have no difficulty in performing it. Lambs should be castrated while young. From one to three weeks of age is ideal. It is much better to perform this operation on a bright day; dark rainy days should be avoided, if possible. Lambs should never be worried or excited before castrating. The practice of cleanliness is of first importance. The danger of loss is negligible; not one lamb in a thousand should die from this operation, if properly performed under sanitary conditions. Losses, when they do occur, generally are due to failure to take proper precautions that the hands are clean and the knife disinfected before each operation.

While the value of attempting to disinfect the wound after the operation is questionable, the importance of cleanliness cannot be over-emphasized. A good antiseptic is a 5-percent solution of carbolic acid or one of the many coal tar dips. If a coal tar dip is used it should be diluted according to the directions on the container. Leave the knife in the disinfectant between operations and for at least ten minutes before operating on the first lamb. The hands should be thoroly washed in the disinfectant before beginning the operations and frequently thereafter.

#### THE OPERATION

Each step of the operation is clearly illustrated in Figs. 1 to 4, inclusive. Hold the lamb in the position shown in Fig. 1. With a sharp knife\* cut off the lower third of the scrotum. Then expose the testicles as shown in Fig. 2. With the upper end of the scrotum grasped firmly between the thumb and forefinger of the left hand, which is pressed against the abdomen, slowly

\* Patented instruments for bloodless castration of lambs are on the market and are preferred by some sheep raisers.



Fig. 1. Cutting off end of scrotum.

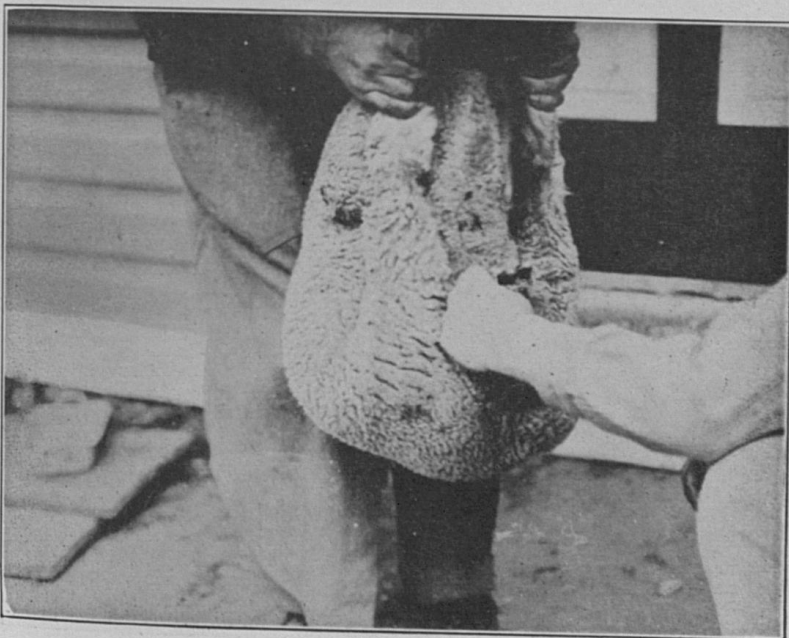


Fig. 2. Testicles exposed



Fig. 3. Pulling out testicles and adhering coras.



Fig. 4. Applying an antiseptic.

Figs. 1-4.—Courtesy U. S. Bureau of Animal Industry.

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pull out the testicles and adhering cords with fingers or tweezers. If old lambs are being castrated, the cords should be scraped off with the knife rather than pulled out. This prevents excessive bleeding.

#### CARE OF LAMBS AFTER CASTRATION

Lambs lie down after the operation, so a clean place should be provided for them. If weather is such that lambs have to be castrated in the barn or taken to the barn within several days after the operation, the barn floor should be bedded down with fresh, clean straw. They should be kept quiet. It is best to castrate in the morning so that the lambs may be watched and attention given in case of excessive bleeding.

#### REASONS FOR DOCKING

1. Docking gives the flock a more uniform and blocky appearance.
2. The docked lamb is cleaner and not so subject to maggots in moist, hot weather.
3. Long tails interfere with breeding the ewes.
4. Lambs with long tails are discriminated against by feeders as the tails often become filthy in the feed lot and in shipment of the lambs to market.
5. Properly docked lambs are an indication of the farmer's pride in his flock.

#### DIRECTIONS FOR DOCKING

Docking is a simple operation that any farmer can perform. To save time lambs should be docked at the time they are castrated, tho if a lamb is weak, it may be wise to let a few days elapse between docking and castrating. If properly done there is little risk in performing both operations at the same time. Lambs should be docked when from one to three weeks old. Either a sharp knife, a docking chisel, or an emasculator may be used in this operation. The tail should be removed at a joint about 1 to 1½ inches from the body.

*Docking with the Knife.* In docking with a knife the skin on the tail should be pushed back slightly toward the body, so as to have some surplus skin to grow over the stub. Then find a joint about 1 to 1½ inches from the body and cut off the tail quickly with a sharp knife.

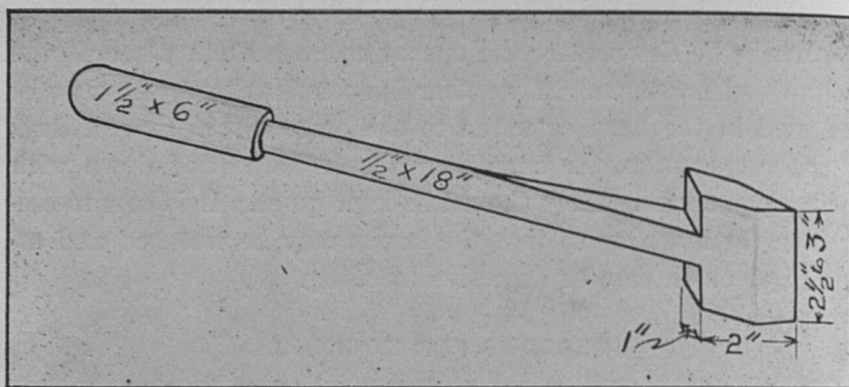


Fig. 5. Docking Chisel.

*Docking with Heated Chisel.* A docking chisel, Fig. 5, can be made by any blacksmith. When heated to the proper degree and used as a docking instrument, the chisel prevents excessive bleeding. The wound made by a hot instrument does not heal so readily as one made with a knife, shears or emasculator. When the chisel is used, care should be taken to see that it is not too hot. There should be some bleeding. This helps the wound to heal. With experience the operator can soon determine the degree of heat and length of time required in removing the tail so as to prevent excessive bleeding. Should blood spurt from an artery, touch the artery slightly with the point of a hot chisel.

When docking is done late in the season, there may be infection from flies. Pine tar should be used on the wound immediately after the operation. If one ounce of carbolic acid is thoroly stirred into 1 pint of pine tar it enhances the value of the tar, as the mixture is not only a deterrent to flies but acts as an anti-septic as well.