

METHODS OF MARKING LAMBS

A clean box, up-ended to hold the instruments and antiseptic, should be placed at a convenient point beside the plank on which the lambs will be rested when being marked. It is sound practice to cover this with a clean towel or old piece of sheet. A small basin filled with methylated spirits should be available and in this all instruments used should be placed when not in the operator's hand. It is desirable to apply antiseptic to the operation wounds, and it is far better to use a small pressure oil can which has been sterilised to squirt on antiseptic than to employ swabs, which rapidly become fouled.

The operator and catchers should wear reasonably clean clothing or sacking overalls.

Catching and Holding

Lambs should be caught as gently as possible and around the body. The use of some form of suitably sized shepherd's crook may help to prevent rough handling, as with it the lamb can be caught from behind in front of the chest. Swollen joints, bruising, or even dislocations may easily result if lambs are caught by the legs.

The catcher places the lamb with its rump on the plank which has been erected across one end of the catching pen, and its back against his body, with the fore and hind legs on either side held together. This allows complete control of the lamb with a minimum of force and leaves the parts to be operated on, the ears, the tail, and the purse, within easy reach of the operator.

Earmarking

It is probably best to do earmarking first, as it is less drastic than the other two operations.

An earmark, or a metal clip affixed to the ear, is defined as a "brand" within the meaning of Section 61 of the Stock Act, 1908, in which an earmark is described as: "An earmark distinctly and plainly made by cutting, splitting, or punching the ear, but so that in no case shall more than one-fourth of the ear be removed". It is obligatory under Sections 61 and 62 of this Act that all lambs shall be branded before April 30 in each year, though it is obviously more convenient and suitable to do this work a few weeks after the lambs are born.

Earmarking is carried out with special pliers and with the usual reasonable antiseptic precautions. If ear tags are used, they should be inserted half-way along the ear with the tag hanging down. It is desirable to use antiseptic solution on the site before and after the operation.

Docking or Amputation of the Tail

The tail should be amputated level with the lower tip of the vulva (the external genital orifice) in the case of female lambs, and a stump of the same length should be left in male lambs. It is immaterial whether the cut is made at a joint or through one of the tail vertebral bones. The younger the lamb is at docking, however, the more rapidly will the wound heal.

There are three common methods of docking tails: By using the knife, the searing iron, or the rubber ring.



[National Publicity Studios photo.]
Earmarking. Note that the lamb is gripped by the body so that the head can be controlled better and injury to joints by struggling avoided.

Use of Knife

Docking by use of the knife is the recommended method, and a one-piece, easily sterilised knife should be used.

The operator holds the tail in one hand, squirts antiseptic solution on the place where the cut will be made, presses the skin upward toward the body, and with a clean, sharp cut with the knife severs the tail. The object of pushing the skin back is to allow for more satisfactory healing and prevent protrusion of the cut bone. The tail may also be bent with the tip toward the lamb's body and cut through at the bend by the operator drawing the knife toward him. This method leaves an overlapping flap of skin which is stated to assist healing. When the operation has been completed some antiseptic should be squirted into the wound.

On many farms it is customary to place the ewe lamb tails in one heap and the wether tails in another to make counting easy.

Docking by Searing Iron

Docking by the searing iron is quite efficient if carefully carried out, when it appears to prevent unfortunate sequels such as arthritis infection (inflamed joints). It is, however, inconvenient, and operators must be thoroughly experienced in the method.

The procedure is similar to that for amputating the tail with a knife, but the tail must be held quite straight and never folded. The searing or docking iron must be at "black heat", not red hot. It is impossible to describe the correct degree of heat and it can be learnt only by experience. Four, six, or more searing irons are necessary and a small brazier for the fire is preferable. Searing irons with internal heating by methylated spirits are available.

The searing iron is pressed lightly on the tail at the desired point, the skin being pressed toward the body as in the knife method, and with gentle pressure the whole structure is seared through. There is no haemorrhage, a light scab will form over the wound, and healing will be fairly rapid. If the iron is too hot, however, tissue damage will be considerable and pus will form under a thick scab. A purulent wound of this nature may result in death from septic poisoning or tetanus. Therefore, though the searing iron method of docking can give very good results and is, in good hands, excellent on arthritis-infected farms, it leaves little or no margin for error.

Antiseptic should be used both before and after the operation.

Docking by Rubber Rings

The use of small rubber rings, made in different sizes and put on the tail at the point desired for amputation, has increased greatly. The skin should be pressed toward the body as with the other methods, and the rings should, if possible, be placed over a joint, though this is not easy. After some days the stoppage of circulation of blood results in gangrene, and the decayed portion of the tail drops off.

An open, ragged, dirty wound is left, and in areas where tetanus infection exists there have been fairly heavy losses from this disease in lambs of all ages docked by this method. From a surgical point of view amputation by ligature of a portion of the animal body with a bony core is not a sound procedure.

Castration of Male Lambs

Castration is effected by the removal or destruction of the testicles. The knife, one of the types of instruments