

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Experiment Station

COLUMBIA, MISSOURI, APRIL, 1913

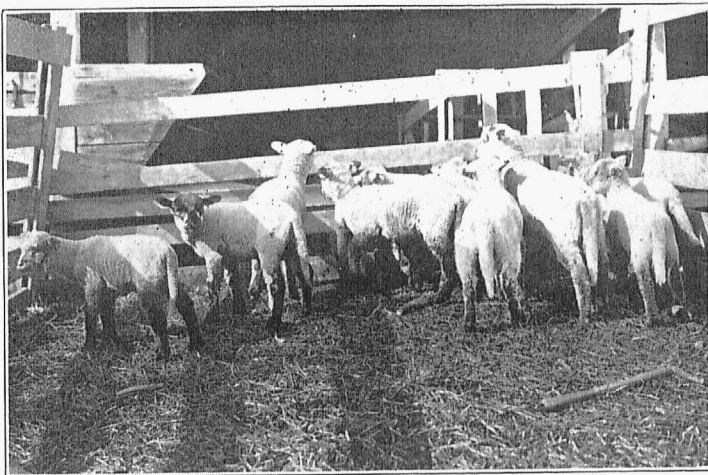
CIRCULAR NO. 61

DOCKING AND CASTRATING LAMBS

H. HACKEDORN.

The purpose of this circular is to describe the more common methods of docking and castrating lambs in order that those who have not performed these simple operations may do so, with the least possible risk.

The importance of docking and castrating lambs is being more fully appreciated each succeeding year. Many who sell lambs in June



DOCKING INCREASES MARKET VALUE

The value of this little bunch of lambs may be increased from \$1.00 to \$8.00 by docking, while at the same time improving their appearance and decreasing the chances of loss during the summer.

and July do not think the beneficial results derived from these operations justify the risk. The common opinion among men in the "Sheep House," however, as expressed by one of the salesmen is that "Docked lambs attract the attention of the buyer and make a much better impression. Especially is this true on a slow 'draggy' market where everyone is trying to sell. I think in some cases that I have seen, it has secured our customers as much as \$.25 to \$.50 per hundred pounds. On a strong market the difference in price is not so marked if the lambs are equally fat and of good quality. Even under these conditions, however, docked lambs have an advantage of finding a ready sale."

The proper time to dock and castrate lambs depends upon their condition of health and general vigor. It is advisable to perform both operations as soon as the lamb becomes strong enough to withstand the shock, which time will vary from four days to three weeks after birth. The weather is another important factor. A bright warm day should be selected in order to lessen the danger of contracting cold and other attendant difficulties. Clean bedding should be provided for the lambs if they are kept inside after the operations have been performed. If the weather will permit, it is advisable to allow the docked and castrated lambs the range of a good pasture. These precautions will lessen the danger of infection. Lambs which have been castrated should be disturbed no more than is necessary for a day or two following the operation.

Docking or taking off the tails is not a serious operation and can be performed with very little risk. During the spring of 1912 at the Experiment Station, two lots of nine lambs averaging 19.7 lbs. and 19.9 lbs. respectively were used to determine the effects resulting from docking and castrating. The ewes and the lambs in this experiment were all kept in the same lot; fed the same feed; and all other conditions were as uniform as it was possible to make them. At the end of the month when all the wounds were healed there was practically no difference in the weights of the two lots.

A common method of docking lambs is to place the lamb upon its rump, either on the ground or on a wooden block and chop the tail off with a dull hatchet. A moderately dull hatchet is preferred to a sharp one, for by bruising and tearing the blood-vessels, clots will form more quickly, which will tend to prevent excessive bleeding. In case the lambs bleed too freely a strong cord should be tied tightly around the stump of the tail, or the wound may be seared with a hot iron. If a cord is used, it should be removed within a few days. Sometimes blood will collect in the wool around the dock unless care

is observed. This latter condition is most favorable for the development of maggots, which may cause trouble.

When docking with the knife, the tail should be taken off at the third or fourth joint from the body, depending upon the length of the dock desired. The skin should be slipped back as far toward the body of the lamb as possible and the cut should be made at the joint. A wound made at the joint heals more quickly than a wound made by cutting through the bone. The object in pushing the skin back toward the body is to provide surplus skin to come over the edge of the wound and facilitate healing. A good disinfectant such as crude carbolic acid or a 5 per cent solution of pure carbolic acid



THE RIGHT WAY TO HOLD A LAMB.

Using the hot docking pinchers with simple arrangement to prevent burning the lamb.

should be used freely. A little pine tar smeared on the end of the dock will keep the flies away, if the weather is warm enough for them to be troublesome. This method will be found quite satisfactory with lambs from four to fourteen days old. Lambs three or four weeks old docked by this method frequently bleed too freely, weakening the lambs and sometimes causing death. The bleeding can be stopped as described above.

In the last few years another method of docking has come into practice. It is docking with hot iron pinchers as seen in illustration on this page. These pinchers can be purchased at various supply houses

at \$1.25 per pair. Docking with the hot iron pinchers will require more time for the operation, but there will seldom be further trouble. By this method there is practically no danger from bleeding, maggots or infection. This method of docking will require two men; one to hold the lamb and another to use the hot pinchers.

In order to prevent burning the body of the lamb, it is advisable to slip the lamb's tail through a hole in an inch board. This board should be held as closely as possible to the body of the lamb. The tail should then be taken off close to the board. The most convenient way to heat the iron pinchers is with a small portable forge or gasoline blow torch, such as is used by tin-smiths and plumbers. Pinchers heated to a dull red heat will be found best suited for this work. When heated to a high degree, or when too much pressure is exerted, the pinchers will burn through too quickly, there-by failing to sear the wound properly. The pinchers should be allowed to burn their way slowly through the tail so as to thoroughly sear the wound.

The general custom is to delay the docking and castrating of the lambs until all lambs have been dropped, so the older lambs will be from six weeks to two months old when the operations are performed. If not docked until this age, the hot pinchers are to be especially recommended.

The castrating is done at the same time as the docking. The lamb should be held in the same manner as for docking. The most simple method is to cut off the lower third of the scrotum and draw out the testicles, pulling the cord clear out instead of cutting it off. Care should be used to not leave any projecting ends of the cords.

A good disinfectant should always be freely used after this operation. If the weather is warm so that flies are troublesome, pine tar smeared over the wound will keep them away. The pine tar also has some slight antiseptic qualities.

The importance of docking and castrating lambs is greatly increased in lambs which are not sold at weaning time. In the fall the ram lambs will not feed out as quickly and as economically as wether lambs. Through the summer when lambs are apt to scour, manure will gather on the tails of undocked lambs making conditions favorable for the development of maggots and detracting from the appearance of the lambs.

With the increasing number of lambs marketed, the competition among sellers increases, and since docked lambs are preferred to undocked ones, the advisability of docking is evident from the market standpoint. From the breeder's point of view, docking decreases the trouble with maggots, and greatly increases the general appearance and uniformity of the flock.