



CASTRATING LARGE RAM LAMBS

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In recent years producers have been leaving their ram lambs "intact". The ram lambs grow faster and more efficiently because the testicles produce testosterone which is a natural growth hormone. This works extremely well for producers who have good genetics and an intensive nutrition program. The idea is to have the lambs to market before they are five months of age. The best lambs will be sold at four months of age. Producers who do not have fast growing genetics or accelerated feed programs should not consider leaving ram lambs intact.

What I wanted to write about was the use of some technology the cattle industry is using to castrate 1000 lb. bulls, and how we have tried it on some 120 lb. market lambs. The packer buyers for lambs have put occasional large discounts on the ram lambs and the producer is faced with the question of selling them at a discount or castrating them. Following castration, the risk of losing some or treating infections is quite possible. Producers do not have options for castration in large ram lambs. Over the years I have tried to cut them or pinch them and the results have not only been variable, but sometimes near disastrous.

The cattle industry has several options of banders that can be used on bull calves. I have banded bulls at the sale barn that weigh well over 1000 lbs. The owners report that the scrotum and testicles fall off in about 3 weeks and the bulls never miss a feeding.

The bulls will lay down and show mild discomfort for about one hour. They do not show the reaction that newborn lambs do when you band and castrate them.

About a month ago a good friend and I banded some of his ram lambs in an "on-the-farm" experiment to see what would happen. I'm glad to report that the lambs not only survived, but they looked quite promising. The lambs laid down almost immediately and showed discomfort, but they all ate the next morning and looked normal. Only one needed some antibiotics the next day. For any of you that have ever tried to pinch ram lambs with a burdizzo you can appreciate what it means to have them eating the next day. We gave each lamb a 2 cc dose of CDT toxoid and 10cc of Benthazine Penicillin at the time of banding. The bands cost about \$3 each. The bands are quite different than sheep bands. The Callicrate

bander has a metal band and the rubber tubing is about the diameter of a ballpoint pen. It requires practice, as well as a special tool to apply. There are other cattle bands on the market and they would produce similar results.

You will need to keep the lambs long enough for the antibiotics to be cleared from their tissues and for the scrotum to be healed. I would guess that 3 to 4 weeks should be adequate.

This is certainly not something that I would routinely recommend, but when faced with \$20 to \$30 discounts it sure becomes an option. When the lambs are being born, check with your lamb buyers to see what their policy is on aram lambs.