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LAMB MARKING

by
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LAMB marking is the most severe of the various ordeals which sheep are called upon to endure during their lifetimes—yet it is an operation, or rather a series of operations, to which the average flockowner gives but little care and thought.

Castration, ear marking and tail docking of male lambs and ear marking and tail docking of ewe lambs are the steps involved—usually in this order. Inoculation for entero-toxaemia (pulpy kidney) protection and the mules and the tail-strip operations for blowfly protection can also be carried out at the same time.

To minimise the losses that can and do occur, attention to age of lambs at marking, the weather and time of day for the operation, the methods used, and observance of strict hygiene will pay big dividends—which means that there will be fewer lambs lost, less check to lamb growth, quicker healing and fewer lambs crippled.

MARK THEM YOUNG

Marking is best carried out when lambs are three to four weeks of age. The younger the lamb at the time of the operation, the less the check will be. Strong lambs can be marked when they are only a few days old and certainly it should be the aim to mark all the lambs before they are six weeks of age.

With protracted lambings, more than one marking will be necessary—the first when the bulk of the lambs are three to four weeks old and subsequently at intervals according to the drop.

Fat lamb breeders wishing to ensure that their lambs receive the minimum check to growth, may mark at an earlier stage and have more frequent markings.

CHOOSE A MILD DAY

Marking should, if possible be carried out on a mild day. Cold wet days and hot sultry weather are unsuitable. Cold wet days added to the shock of marking can easily cause losses. Blowfly strike is often a problem in hot sultry weather.

TIME OF DAY

Finish early in the day—allowing time for lambs to “mother up” by nightfall.

On the day of the operation, the lambs should not be overheated by too much driving. Finishing early—no later than three to four o’clock in the afternoon—will allow lambs and ewes time to sort themselves out and “mother up” before nightfall. Careful shepherding to assist this process is a necessary precaution.

THE SITE

The common diseases of lamb marking, tetanus, arthritis, gangrene, and caseous lymphadenitis (cheesy gland) all result from organisms which abound in soil and droppings around old sheepyards or camps.

Use Temporary Yards

Marking wounds give these organisms an ideal opportunity to attack the lamb. It is therefore highly desirable that marking be carried out away from any source of infection. Temporary yards erected on a new site each year will achieve this at little cost. For preference they should be in the paddock in which the ewes and lambs are running. With the provision of
The catching pen in the corner of the paddock can be made with sheep hurdles and steel droppers. The hurdles act as gates where indicated. Ewes and lambs are driven into the holding pen and into the catching pen through Gate 2 as required. Lambs are marked and dropped into the paddock. The ewes are let out of Gate 1 of the catching pen.

SIZE OF HOLDING PEN CAN BE ADJUSTED ACCORDING TO FLOCK NUMBERS

TEMPORARY YARDS FOR LAMB MARKING

Fig. 1—Diagram showing suitable layout for temporary lamb-marking yard
such temporary yards the lambs, once marked can be dropped on to clean ground in the paddock where they are to run with their mothers. Hot dusty driving is avoided and the lambs can soon find their mothers and readily settle down.

If for any reason temporary yards cannot be erected and it is necessary to mark in old permanent yards—cleaning away droppings and refuse, using a new clean marking board, and arranging for lambs to drop on to the grass outside the yards will all help to minimise the risk of infection.

Fig. 2—Two popular types of lamb-marking knives. That on the left has a toothed clam for withdrawing the testicles. That on the right has a hook for the same purpose.

CASTRATION

Castration involves very tender tissue—be firm but not rough—quick but not careless.

A knife, elastrator or bloodless emasculator can all be used for castrating lambs. A good sharp knife is preferred by most operators, as it is quick, sure and effective, resulting in clean wounds which heal rapidly.

Using the knife, the most common method of castrating is to cut off the end of the purse or scrotum ("tipping"), and withdraw the testicles with a hook or toothed grip on the end of the marking knife—some people use their teeth.

An alternative is to slit the purse from side to side ("slitting"), press the testicles through and withdraw them.

"Tipping" allows better drainage of the wound. With "slitting," the advantage is that it allows more cod fat and a slightly better appearance when the wether is fattened for market.

Sometimes one or both testicles are not "let down" and cannot be grasped by the operator for removal—resulting in imperfectly castrated animals—commonly called "stags." Such animals should only have about two inches of their tails removed so that the owner can pick them out and dispose of them at a later date.

Elastration.

Using small strong rubber rings expanded and applied with an instrument called an elastrator, elastration is a bloodless method of castrating or tailing. It uses the principle of restricting the blood supply to the scrotum or tail so that they eventually wither and drop off.

In castration the ring is applied between the scrotum and the body, cutting off the blood supply to the scrotum, and eventually causing it to wither and fall off.

Emasculators.

Bloodless emasculators of various types are sometimes used for treating lambs without cutting the scrotum. These use the principle of crushing the cords leading from the testicles and so rendering the animal sterile. They have the advantage that they cause less shock and lessen risk of disease and flystrike but they are slower to operate, and unless used carefully may result in a percentage of "stags" or imperfectly castrated animals. The instrument is in the form of blunt-nosed pincers which crush the spermatic cords without breaking the skin of the scrotum or purse.
Ear Marking

Use sharp, well set pliers.

Mark ewes on the right or off ear.
Mark males on the left or near ear.

Special pliers with the owner's registered ear mark are used for this part of marking. Ewes are marked on the right ear and wethers and rams on the left. A quick sure movement is used. It is an offence to put any other mark on the registered ear other than the registered ear mark.

(Note.—Inquiries about registered ear marks should be directed to the Registrar of Brands, Department of Agriculture, Perth.)

Ear Age Marks.

These are not compulsory, but if applied, the six-year cycle in the ear opposite the registered mark must be used.

In addition to the registered ear mark a system of distinctive ear age marks is used by some owners.

Owners desiring to age-mark must conform to the provisions of the Brand Act which states that "in every sixth year after 1905 the off or near ear, as the case may be, of all sheep lambed during the year shall be left clean; for every sixth year after 1906, the age mark shall consist of one notch on the front of the ear; for sheep lambed every sixth year after 1907 the age mark shall consist of two notches on the front of the ear; for sheep lambed every sixth year after 1908 the age mark shall consist of three notches in the front..."
of the ear, for sheep lambed every sixth year after 1909, the age mark shall consist of one notch in the back of the ear; for sheep lambed every sixth year after 1910 the age mark shall consist of two notches on the back of the ear."

**Table Showing Years for Age Marks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clean</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1965</th>
<th>1971</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One notch front</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two notches front</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three notches front</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One notch back</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two notches back</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1976</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DOCKING**

Cutting tails level with the tip of the vulva (and equivalent in wethers) is the correct tail length and the beginning of blowfly control.

Tailing or docking may be done with the knife, elastrator or searing-iron. As for castration, the knife is generally considered the most satisfactory method.

The method of cutting and the tail length are of vital importance in the future life of the sheep. Trials have been shown that, for prevention of crutch and tail strikes, cutting the tail level with the tip of the vulva in ewes and the equivalent length in wethers is the beginning of maximum fly control. (The mules operation and tail strip at lamb marking or later in the sheep’s life completes the protection). The reason for the importance of tail length is that the correct length tail helps to keep dry the bare area around the vulva. A tail of the right length parts the wool around the vulva keeping it away from urine moisture. In addition it can sweep across the vulva in a sideways movement drying the bare area after the ewe has urinated. Short tails cannot do this and crutch strikes are worse in sheep with tails cut this way than in any other. Overlong tails tend to collect moisture and become daggy and provide ideal sites for fly-strike.

In the case of wethers the medium tail length allows the tail to be correctly tailstripped when this operation is carried out.

**Diagram Showing Six-Year Ear Age-Marking Cycle**

**Diagram Showing Sheep Correctly Ear Marked and Age Marked for 1960**

*Fig. 5—Diagram showing method of age-marking sheep*
In cutting the tail, place the knife edge \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. below where the cut will be made. Push the loose skin up to the correct level. Fold the tail over with the tip pointing towards the brisket and make the cut.

Cutting in this way allows a flap of loose skin to heal upwards over the severed stump of the tail further increasing blow-fly protection as there is no wool-bearing skin left near the vulva to become soiled with urine and so attract flies.

Tail length and method of cutting are of great importance—this part of marking is best left to careful and reliable workers.

If the sheep blowfly is active however, a dressing may be applied to the wool on the tail and around the crutch and around the Scrotum of wethers.

**HYGIENE**

*Use sharp tools and be clean at all times.*

It should always be remembered that in lamb marking tender sensitive tissue is being exposed. Strict hygiene is a must.

Operators and instruments should be as clean as possible at all times. Boil the instruments for five minutes before commencing the day's marking and keep them in a tin of antiseptic between successive lambs.

In using the knife keep it sharp as this gives a clean wound. Blunt instruments slow down the work and bruise off rather than cut off—bruised areas take longer to heal. Remember that although quickness in making clean cuts is desirable, breaking records at lamb marking should not be the aim.

**DISEASES FOLLOWING LAMB MARKING**

For a discussion of diseases that may follow upon lamb marking see Departmental Bulletin No. 2651 or pages 395-401 of the July-August, 1959 issue of "The Journal of Agriculture."

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Fig. 6—Photograph showing correct method of tailing a lamb

It is usual to place ewe and wether tails in separate heaps and so obtain a tally of lambs marked according to sexes.

Note.—In using the elastration method for removing tails the ring should be placed \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. lower down the tail than the required length. This allows for shrinkage of the tissues when the tail drops off and the final result is a tail removed level with the tip of the vulva.

**AFTER-TREATMENT**

No dressing or after treatment is generally needed if marking is done under clean conditions in temporary yards. The wounds heal quicker and better if left alone.
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