A guide to good lamb marking

H E. Fels
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Lamb marking is a severe ordeal for young sheep, and can cause deaths or serious setbacks to growth. To help avoid these hazards, sheep and wool adviser H. E. Fels gives

**A GUIDE TO GOOD LAMB MARKING**

LAMB marking is the most severe of the various ordeals that sheep are called upon to endure. It is a series of surgical operations, each involving a risk of infection, and some involving risks of severe haemorrhage. Growth rate is reduced to the same extent by rubber rings as by the knife.

General principles for lamb marking are:

- Mark them young—between 10 days and 40 days of age maybe ideal, but with care younger lambs can be marked safely.
- Choose a mild day—cold wet days can increase post-marking death rates, and hot sultry days bring a risk of fly strike.
- Mark on a clean site; preferably mark out of a temporary yard in the paddock the ewes and lambs are running in. If marking out of sheepyards, drop the lambs on to grass outside the yards.
- Avoid driving ewes and lambs for any distance before or after marking.
- Take the opportunity to mules at marking time. Mulesing after weaner shearing may give a neater job, but mulesing at marking time avoids double handling and protects the lambs through their first fly strike season.
- Take the opportunity to inoculate lambs against enterotoxaemia, remembering to re-inoculate a month later.
- Keep knives, mulesing shears and earmarking pliers well sharpened. Sharp tools will cut cleanly and

![A good arrangement for lamb marking. Using a revolving marking cradle, a team of men earmark, inoculate, mules and tail the lambs, and dust the wounds with diazinon powder to discourage fly strike. The lambs are marked out of a temporary yard in the paddock in which they are running.](image-url)
TAILING A LAMB...
(One of several suitable methods)

1 The tail should be cut level with the tip of the vulva (arrowed) in ewes and to the same length in wethers.
   Take the tail in the left hand, with the thumb on the underside of the tail.

2 Push the skin on the underside of the tail down towards the vulva and use the thumbnail to mark where the tail is to be cut, level with the tip of the vulva.

cause less bruising, which worsens surgical shock and increases risk of infection.

- Avoid panicking the ewes or lambs, and avoid rough handling.
- Keep ewes and lambs separate for only the shortest possible time.

Good tradesmanship and sympathetic handling are worthwhile. Some regular causes of post-marking deaths are:

- Mismothering of newborn lambs. Lambs should not be separated from their mothers during the first few days.
- Cold and mismothering, due to marking in cold windy conditions, or, especially, cold wet windy conditions.
- Haemorrhage, due to
  (a) chasing lambs around the paddock or around the yard shortly before tailing.
  (b) tailing older lambs.
  (c) pulling out the testes so violently that the major blood vessels in the abdomen are torn.

- Surgical shock, made more severe than necessary by hacking with a blunt knife, or by slicing-out leg muscle or rump muscle while mulesing.

- Infection, due to
  (a) marking in old yards.
  (b) not cleaning the marking-board, or marking cradle.
  (c) not cleaning and sterilising tools.

EARMARKING:
The registered earmark is cut into the left ear of ewes or the right ear of wethers and rams. Earmarking pliers should be sharp and well set.
Cut the tail off at the point marked by the thumbnail.

The loose skin on the underside of the tail remains after the tail is cut, and as the cut cures, covers the stub with bare skin.

 REMOVING TESTES:
Testes are usually removed by cutting off the tip of the purse, pressing out the testes by hand, and pulling them out gently one by one.

 CUTTING OFF TAILS:
Correct tail-length reduces blowfly risks throughout life. Normally the tail should be cut level with the tip of the vulva in ewes, and to the same length in wethers. If lambs are radically mulesed at marking time, the tail may be cut off at the butt.

One method of cutting off the tail is illustrated above. Another is to select the position of the cut, place the knife-edge half an inch further down the tail, push the loose skin up to the required level on the tail, fold the tail up towards the lamb's hocks, and cut it off. This way, an extra flap of bare skin is kept on the underside of the tail. This flap of bare skin cures over the stub of the tail, giving faster curing and a less woolly tail.

Flystrike and diseases due to marking wounds
With winter or spring lambing there may be risks of fly strike in marking wounds, especially if tailing is not done before the blowfly season. Diazinon dust on wounds may delay healing a little but will minimise blowfly trouble.

Remember that with rubber rings the period of blowfly susceptibility will begin a week after marking and continue until a week or so after tails and purses drop off.

Also rubber rings increase risks of gangrene and tetanus which can kill large numbers of lambs without warning. There is a case for rubber rings on the occasional property where arthritis is a perennial problem despite the use of sharp knives and clean conditions.
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