



DEHORNING OF CALVES

I can remember the first experiences I had of dehorning calves as a youngster. Our veterinarian used a Barnes style dehorner on calves that were yearlings. Most of the horns were 3 inches long and the hole left in their skull went all the way into the sinus. After the procedure was over the pen of calves was a bloody mess. A few of the calves later had to be treated for sinus infections. And of course, it took awhile before the calves returned to normal behavior.

THERE IS A BETTER WAY- LESS PAIN = LESS STRESS.

Dehorn at the youngest age possible. Use a local anesthetic (such as Lidocaine) to reduce pain. Anesthetics are recommended whether you use dehorning paste, hot iron, or debudding and certainly if dehorning is done on older animals. Analgesics such as Flunixin should be used when there is a lot of tissue damage. This occurs with animals older than 8 weeks; because the horn bud is then attached to the skull.

My preferred method of dehorning is using a small Portosol type dehorner before weaning. I used a

nerve block to reduce pain and clip the area to insure the iron stays hot during the process.

Here is a summary of the dehorning techniques available today.

Chemical Dehorning

Advantages and Disadvantages:

- Performed at a young age with less stress than some other techniques
- Bloodless
- Use in any season
- Painful without anesthesia
- Avoid contact with eyes; operator should wear gloves
- Do not use in rainy weather
- Not permitted in some countries
- Horns or scurs follow improper technique
- Requires pain control

Hot Iron Dehorning

Advantages and Disadvantages:

- Bloodless
- Can be used at any time of the year
- Young calves up to 12 weeks of age

- Unreliable when done incorrectly, leads to scurs (partial horn growth)
- Requires expertise—pain control and technique

Dehorning Spoon or Tube

Advantages and Disadvantages:

- Not bloodless
- Useful for young calves
- Risk of infection because of open wounds
- Avoid use during fly season
- Unreliable when done incorrectly, leads to scurs
- Requires expertise— pain control, technique, control of bleeding

Scoop, Gouge or Barnes-Type Dehorner

Advantages and Disadvantages:

- Fast— takes a few seconds to perform
- Useful after the horn bud attaches to the skull
- Not bloodless
- Risk of infection because of open wounds

