

# Texas Dairy Matters

*Higher Education Supporting the Industry*

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## TIME TO REVIEW PROCEDURES

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As we care for the animals in our herds, we occasionally need to step back and review our practices and procedures. This year, the American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP) issued guidelines for dehorning and castration. Take time this winter to determine if your farm practices comply with the new industry standards aimed at enhancing calf welfare.

### *Dehorning practices*

Remove horns as soon after birth as possible but definitely before they reach one-inch in diameter. To minimize stress either chemically or mechanically restrain the calf. For chemical restraint, work with your veterinarian to determine which product and dose is appropriate for your farm situation. Train your employees in low stress handling and proper restraint procedures for chemical or mechanical restraint. Provide well-maintained equipment to properly control head movement. This minimizes the chance of injury to calf and handler as well as stress.

To improve animal well-being, consider using a local anesthetic to reduce the pain of dehorning. Since anesthetics are prescription drugs, again work with your veterinarian to determine protocols for your farm. Administer anti-inflammatories after dehorning to provide the animal pain relief. The Animal Medicinal Drug Use Clarification Act (AMDUCA) allows a veterinarian to prescribe certain drugs to be administered in an extra label use if appropriate. Adhere to the meat withholding time recommended by your veterinarian when selling calves.

The three acceptable means of dehorning include: caustic paste during the first two weeks of life, a small Barne's type dehorner when horns are less than one inch in diameter, or using polled genetics to eliminate the horns.

### *Castration*

Castrate bull calves prior to 120 days of age. If keeping bull calves for breeding purposes, conduct DNA typing soon after birth to aid in the selection of which calves to keep. Genetics don't change so there is no need to wait. Early typing allows for early selection so castration can occur within the recommended time line.

Again to minimize stress to the calf and the potential for injury to the calf or the handler, use chemical or mechanical restraint as discussed previously. Involve your veterinarian in deciding which method or combination is the best for your herd. Develop written protocols for restraint and train employees that assist with the procedure.

The preferred methods of castration include using a rubber ring/ band or surgically removing the testicles. Again select the method that fits with the restraint procedures and equipment available on the farm. With either method, train employees to palpate the calf's testicles and make sure both have descended before starting the procedure. When banding, have the employee double check that both testicles are through the band before removing the band from the applicator.

### ***Summary***

Take the time to review castration and dehorning procedures being used on your farm with your veterinarian. Prepare written protocols including any veterinarian prescribed local anesthesia and systemic pain relief medications. Train your employees on the procedures including low stress handling methods during restraint. Provide pain relief medications and low stress handling to improve animal well-being. Protect both the animal and employee from injury by incorporating proper restraint methods into your protocols.