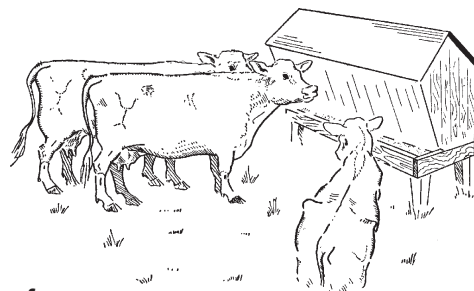




Beef cattle: dehorning

Reasons

- The occurrence of severe bruising is much lower in dehorned than in horned cattle.
- Bruised meat on carcasses, usually the result of horn blows during transport, is condemned for human consumption at abattoirs and causes great financial losses.
- Cattle can be fed more conveniently and easily with less interference from dominant animals.
- Less trough space is required for dehorned than for horned animals.
- There is less danger of injury to udders, flanks and eyes, as well as to attendants.
- A larger number of dehorned animals can be trucked, housed and fed together.



Methods

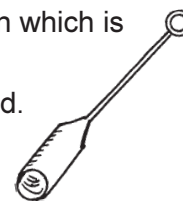
The caustic stick

- This method is only suitable for smallholders with few cattle.
- Caustic soda (stick, paste) is applied to the hornbud before the calf is 10 days old.
- Animals should be protected from the rain after treatment, because the caustic soda can run down and cause damage to the calf's face. When the calf suckles it can even lead to damage to the cow's udder.



The hot iron

- The horn-forming tissue at the base of the hornbud is burnt with a debudding iron which is heated by gas or fire.
- Dehorning with the hot iron should be performed when the calf is 3 to 6 weeks old.
- The iron is heated dull red, pressed onto the bud and slowly moved in a circular manner for about 10 seconds.
- If the bud is too large the tip first has to be removed with a sharp pocket knife or a nucleator.
- Hold the calf firmly to ensure that the method is effective.



Other instruments

- Other dehorning instruments such as the nucleator, debudding spoons and knives are not generally recommended, because these result in open wounds and possible further complications. Horn stubs also often develop following the use of these methods.

Polled bulls

- The polled trait is dominant, and offspring of a polled bull will also be polled, even though the dams have horns.



Dehorning of mature cattle

- In adult cattle, dehorning is best performed by a veterinary surgeon.
- The Hodges instrument is used to dehorn cattle younger than about 18 months, and the Keystone instrument for older cattle.
- Dehorning of mature cattle can also be performed with an embryotomy wire or by hacksaw.
- The incorrect use of these instruments/tools can cause serious damage and even lead to fatalities.
- Calves should preferably be dehorned at a young age (prior to weaning).

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