



Cattle Producer's Handbook

Management Section

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Castration of Bulls

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Castration is the removal of the testicles of bulls. Castrated beef animals are called steers. Steers will typically produce a better marbled carcass that will grade higher than bulls. Steers are also typically much easier to handle and are easier on facilities and equipment than bulls.

Although calves from a few days of age up to 8 months of age can be castrated without serious consequences, most calves are castrated using bands soon after birth. Older animals are more difficult to restrain and usually bleed more, requiring more precaution and care. Younger calves typically recover from the process much quicker.

Bloodless Castration

Elastrators are a forceps-like instrument used to place a strong elastic band around the scrotum at the site of its attachment at the groin (Fig. 1). The pressure exerted by the rubber band shuts off the blood supply to the scrotum and testicles, causing them to slough off after 7 to 21 days. The elastrator should be used before the calves are 2 weeks of age.

Disadvantages include the increased risk of tetanus (lockjaw), infections under/around the elastic band,

elastic band breakage before castration occurs, and the possibility of missing one of the testicles with the band.

The elastrator can also be used to castrate calves physiologically without removal of the testicles. In this process, the testicles are forced as close to the abdomen as possible, and the rubber band is placed on the scrotum below the testicles. This will cause the scrotum to slough off but will leave the testicles positioned between the skin and muscles of the body wall.

The body heat of the animal is enough higher that the testicles will not produce viable sperm cells, but the growth response from testosterone and other male hormones produced by the testicles continues. These calves will have a normal sex drive and may become staggy in appearance. This method of castration should be done before the calves are 6 to 8 months of age.

The **Burdizzo** is another method of bloodless castration (Fig. 2). This method is often used on older calves and can be successful if properly applied. This method damages the blood supply to the testicle and causes the testicle to be reabsorbed.

The clamping procedure is completed best when the bull calf is standing and restrained with a tail hold (tail



Fig. 1. Elastrator.



Fig. 2. Burdizzo.