## Tail Docking in Show Lambs

Presentation developed by

Mary Beth Bennett

Berkeley County Extension Agent

March 2014







The policy applies to sheep born after January 1, 2002

## The Policy

The policy stated for the youth sheep projects (both breeding sheep and market lambs) and for exhibition of animals by youth at fairs and shows in West Virginia is:

"Lambs born after January 1, 2002 will be accepted for exhibition only if tails are not docked shorter than the level of the distal end of the caudal tail fold. Lambs that are properly docked will have a minimum tail length of .7 inches at show, measured by the approved measurement device, which will be placed against the base of the tail and pinbones." It is strongly recommended that tails should be at least 1.4 inches in length at weaning.



Sheep exhibitors need to adhere to the policy as stated and make sure that you do not purchase a lamb with a tail shorter than 1.4 inches at weaning.

Note that it should be docked at the distal end of the caudal tail fold and not the .7 inches required to meet the policy requirement at the time of our

fair.



Tail removal or docking of lambs by the commercial sheep industry is a standard management practice.

When properly docked, the tail or dock will be long enough that when lifting the tail to defecate, the caudal folds on the under side of the tail are raised.

This helps direct the feces away from the body, preventing contamination of the hindquarters.

The docked tail will help prevent fly strike and provide coverage of the perineal and vulvar areas, protecting against harsh weather and not interfere with reproductive processes.

Ideally, docking should be done within the first two weeks following birth, using one of the following methods, knife; shears; hot iron pincers or chisels; emasculator; Burdizzo pincers; or elastrators.

In recent years many Livestock exhibitors and show lamb producers have adopted the practice of sever tail docking.

It is presumed that such docking improves the eye appeal of the animal, making the rump look longer and squarer and the leg to appear larger and more full.



Such procedures have been termed "extreme tail docking in sheep" by the American Veterinary Medical Association. The cosmetic tail dock typically is shorter than the caudal tail fold and has evolved to the point of surgical removal of caudal vertebrae, often resulting in the loss of nerves to the rectum and anal sphincter, predisposing lambs to rectal prolapse.

The condition is painful, and repair is unprofitable.

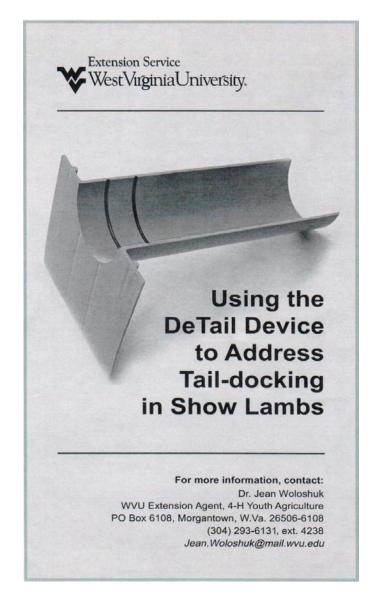
Therefore, docking lambs' tails to the proper length is necessary to avoid negative physiological and economic consequences.

In a letter to the National 4-H Program Leader and signed by the American Veterinary Medical Association, the American Sheep Industry, the American Farm Bureau, and the United States Animal Health Association, concerns were expressed about **extreme tail** docking, recognizing that docking sheep tails is desirable when used for hygienic purposes and to minimize fly strike.

However, **extreme tail docking** can increase the incidence of rectal prolapse and is unacceptable for the health and welfare of sheep.

The American Veterinary Medical Association supports our position "Lambs' tails may be docked for cleanliness and to minimize fly strike, but cosmetic, excessively short tail docking can lead to an increased incidence of rectal prolapse and is unacceptable for the welfare of the lamb. We recommend that lambs' tails be docked at the level of the distal end of the caudal tail fold and at the earliest age practicable. Because tail docking causes pain and discomfort, the AVMA recommends the use of procedures and practices that reduce or eliminate these effects, including the use of approved or AMDUCA-permissible clinically effective medications whenever possible."

https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Docking-of-Lambs-Tails.aspx





A De Tail Device brochure is available for you to use in helping to determine if a lambs tail will measure the recommended length at fair time by using a DeTail Device.

Please do your part in helping with the welfare of your animals by showing up with a properly docked lamb and/or breeding sheep for the Berkeley County Youth Fair.

If you have any additional questions regarding the Sheep Tail Docking Length for Youth Shows please feel free to contact Jean Woloshuk who's contact information is provided on the Using the DeTail Device to Address Tail-docking in Show Lambs brochure.

You can also find additional information at:

http://4-hyd.ext.wvu.edu/programs/youth ag

## Thank You



