

HEALTH & MANAGEMENT

THE BASICS OF DISBUDDING KIDS

by Beth Johnson, DVM

Have you ever noticed that some goats, especially dairy breeds, don't have horns? As a dairy goat producer, I have answered many questions over the years regarding the horns of our animals. As a veterinarian, I would much rather disbud young farm animals than have to dehorn them as more mature livestock. Disbudding is the act of removing the horn bud through the use of cauterization either by heat or caustic paste in young livestock before they are 2 weeks of age. This article will discuss the principles of how this is done including proper technique to do it humanely.

Why do we remove the horns from livestock? After all isn't this one of their defenses to predators. Yes it is, but they also use their horns on herd mates or their handlers. Horns can also cause an animal to become entrapped in fences which may cause dehydration from not being found, strangulation or easy prey for their predators. In a dairy situation, it is extremely important to remove the horns to prevent injury to the mammary gland which is very susceptible to trauma.

There has been much discussion in recent years to minimize the pain associated with common farm management practices. Local anesthesia can be administered. An injection of 1-2 cc of lidocaine will deaden the horn bud which significantly reduces the pain associated with disbudding. If a producer would like to administer pain medicine after the procedure, a NSAID called meloxicam has been used for pain alleviation and is available through your veterinarian.

Disbudding Process

The hair must first be clipped away from the horn buds. This is performed to reduce the amount of heat it takes to perform the procedure but also to allow excellent visualization of the horn bud. Disbudding should be done when the kids are 4-7 days of age. Feel for the presence of the horn bud, males tend to develop horn buds faster than females. Animals that are older than 14 days of age may have horn regrowth after disbudding in the form of scurs.

After clipping be sure the dehorning

iron is hot enough. A piece of wood is a good choice to use as a test to see if the iron is hot enough. After just a couple of seconds of applying the iron to the piece of wood, a nice burnt ring should be present. If not, you should evaluate your equipment. A dehorning iron that does not get hot enough is dangerous to use and may cause

thermal brain damage to the young animal. I have always used a dehorner iron made by Stone manufacturing, see figure 1. Go to this site if looking for this dehorning iron. <http://stonemfg.net/our-brands/stone-brand-products/dehorners.html>

The next step is to find a good holder. If you do not have an individual that feels comfortable with being able to hold the animal while being disbudded, you may want to use a disbudding box. Figure 2 shows a box that can be made and if you need instructions look at <http://www.betterhensandgardens.com/goat-disbudding-box-plans/> for directions. I prefer a human holder since you can monitor the kid while performing the procedure. I am right-handed therefore I place the kids head on the right knee of the holder keeps the ears back from the head, I hold the nose of the kid and apply firm pressure with the dehorning iron which is placed over the horn bud of the kid. With a rotating firm pressure applied, I count to 3-5 seconds and then lift the iron off the head and visualize the treated area. If you do not see a good copper color or white area around the horn bud, then the iron should be reapplied. Never apply the iron for longer than 5 seconds and if you have to apply it more often than three



Picture of properly disbudded kid with horn bud still in place. Horn bud can be removed easily by "popping" it off with the dehorning iron.



Figure 1: Stone Dual Dehorner

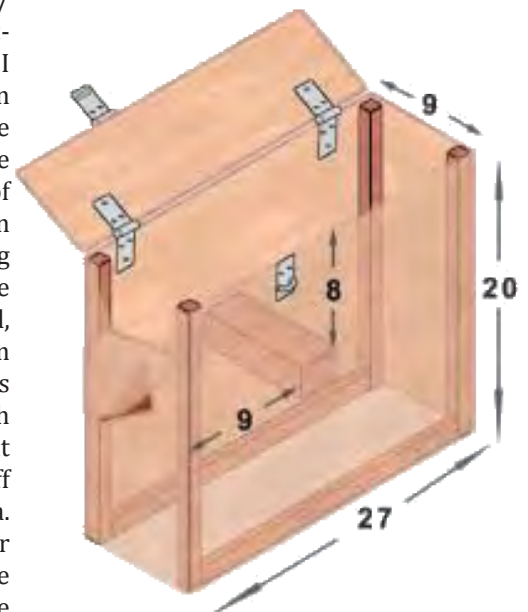


Figure 2: Disbudding box

times your iron is not getting hot enough. After you have achieved the appropriate color remove the horn bud from the skull by using a sweeping motion with the dehorning iron or a knife. The disbudded horn bud should then be recauterized if it is bleeding. Proceed to the next horn bud.

After disbudding, I spray Aluspray (Neogen product) on their heads to help with preventing infection and speed up healing.

Disbudding with Caustic Paste

The initial steps are the same as with the dehorning iron. Lidocaine and/or Meloxicam can also be administered to aid with pain associated with the paste. After the hair is clipped off and the horn bud identified, apply the paste in a circular motion to the horn bud. A ring of Vaseline can be applied around the pasted area to prevent the paste from leaving the horn bud area. If the kid is nursing a doe, keep the kid separated from its dam for at least an hour after applying the paste. Figure 3. is a picture on one of the caustic pastes



Figure 3:
Disbudding caustic paste

available for sale for disbudding kids/calves.

If the dam of the kid did not receive a booster Clostridial perfringens Type CD & Tetanus vaccination 30 days prior to kidding, the kid should receive a tetanus antitoxin, 150iu, IM.

A word of warning that the first few times you disbud your kids it will seem that this is extremely difficult but as with everything, practice makes perfect. If you do not feel comfortable doing this, please have your kids disbudded by someone who is knowledgeable about disbudding.

Dr. Beth Johnson is a Staff Veterinarian in the Kentucky Department of Agriculture and has 40 years of experience raising and treating small ruminants. Her family farm is in Parksville, KY where she raises Gelbvieh cattle and Boer goats.



The Kentucky Sheep and Goat Check-Off Program collects \$.50 for every \$100 worth of sheep and goats sold in the Commonwealth. According to Kentucky law, Check-Off funds must be used for the purpose of promoting the increased use and sale of sheep and goats.

- **Special Project Proposal-** The Kentucky Sheep and Goat Council will use check-off dollars to fund special sheep and goat related projects from Kentucky residents designed to meet at least one of the following two objectives. 1. Increasing the supply of sheep and goats in Kentucky. 2. Increasing the consumption of Kentucky raised sheep and goat products. Proposals will be accepted twice per year, on December 31st and on June 30th and applicants will be notified of their funding status within three months of the application deadline.
- Examples of projects are the promotion of goat or lamb at public events or educating potential producers on the benefits of raising sheep and goats.

To learn more details about the Kentucky Sheep and Goat Check-off Program visit www.kysheepandgoat.org/Check_Off.html