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**Updated Dehorning Guidance**

In late 2019, the American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP) updated the guidance for dehorning practices. Dehorning recommendations are now separated from castration and pain mitigation strategies have been added. Statistically speaking, the number of US beef cattle that are genetically horned has dramatically decreased. The vast majority of beef cattle producers have embraced the opportunity to incorporate polled genetics. This selection has decreased the need to practice dehorning cattle. Dehorned cattle require less feed trough space, are less dangerous to handle or transport and present a lower risk of injury to other animals.

Producers with horned cattle may find that a written dehorning plan improves efficiency and animal welfare. A successful plan will lay out the protocol for skilled personnel to adequately restrain and appropriately administer pain management. Furthermore, wound management to avoid infection and external parasites is addressed. This written protocol is developed along with a veterinarian, to establish the best age and technique for the individual farm to minimize stress and promote healing.

There are two common forms of horn removal: disbudding and mechanical removal of the horns. Disbudding involves the removal of the horn-producing corium in young calves. This can occur as early as 24 hours of life. As with any procedure, care must be taken to prevent injury. Disbudding is preferable over dehorning but is not often practical for beef producers. The next best method is to dehorn stock before they are three months old. Producers should follow the plan established by their veterinarian to take into consideration their particular facilities.

In the dairy industry, horned calves can be disbudded with caustic paste. A small amount is applied to the shaved horn buds of calves less than 24 hours old. In the initial stages of life, the calf is unable to pinpoint the source of irritation, and therefore does not use its foot to try to rid itself of the paste. The application of such paste is often not practical for beef calves and cow calf farm management systems.

Another way to improve dehorning practices, involves the consideration of both physical and chemical restraint. Recommended restraint techniques maintain both human and animal safety as well as minimize stress. Facilities should be in good working order and safely secure the head of the calf. Chemical restraint may be considered in conjunction with physical restraint. Sedatives should be used only on the order of a veterinarian. Although some sedatives may offer pain control, many do not, and pain management should be employed to improve animal welfare following the procedure.

Dehorning is inherently painful. The AABP now considers pain management strategies basic standard of care for all disbudding and dehorning procedures. Local anesthesia can provide immediate relief for up to five hours following the procedure. Longer term pain control can be achieved using non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

It is important to recognize that there is no NSAID currently labeled for pain relief after dehorning. The NSAID chosen must be prescribed by a licensed veterinarian for this extra-label drug use. The Animal Medicinal Drug Use Clarification Act requires the use of an extra-label medication only with a valid Veterinary Client Patient Relationship, documented drug selection process, records maintenance and observance the defined withholding times.

Dehorning processes, and ultimately the producers return on investment, can be improved by implementation of these techniques and regular communication with your veterinarian.

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