



When's the Best Time to Castrate?

Bee Lutz
Practical Farmers of Iowa
Annual Conference 2025



It depends

:-)



Bee Lutz // Hollyhock Land & Livestock

St Croix River Valley

Entering seventh season tending own herd

Tenant farmer entirety of career

- Incubator farm for three seasons
- Renting land+infrastructure from private land owners

Transitioned from exclusively meat to targeted grazing as primary enterprise, meat quality market kids as secondary enterprise

Values & practices

- Management intensive adaptive rotational grazing, targeted grazing
- Ecological resilience
- Accessibility & adaptability
- Herd culture as a solo goatherd/grazier
 - Easy handling
 - Calm, minimal flighty behavior
 - Relaxed bucks



PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA
COOPERATORS'
PROGRAM Farmer-Led Research

Castration Timing in Goats and Sheep

PFI's Cooperators' Program is the heart of the organization and honors its founders' vision and values: curiosity and creativity driving the improvement of farm businesses

TABLE 1. Trial management for each farm in 2023.

	FAGAN & BRECKBILL	LEDVINA	LUTZ
Species	Sheep	Goat	Goat
Breed	Katahdin / Dorper cross	Kiko	Kiko
Animals per treatment group	10	5-7	5-6
Castration method	Burdizzo (Treatment A) Banded (Treatment B)	Banded	Banded
Treatment A	Castrate at 1-4 weeks old	Not Castrated	Castrate at about 8 weeks old
Treatment B	Castrate at 6-8 weeks old	Castrate at 4 weeks old	Castrate at about 12 weeks old
Treatment C	--	Castrate at 8 weeks old	--
Kidding dates	May 5 to May 19, 2023	Apr. 1, 2023	Mar. 7 to Apr. 15, 2023
Final Weighing date	Nov. 7, 2023 (slaughter, hanging weights)	July 1, 2023	Oct. 21, 2023
Pasture Description	Cool season pasture, mostly orchard grass and some legumes	Brush	April through May cool season pasture and grass/alfalfa hay. Late May into June grazing woodland and grassy pasture.

Results

No statistically significant difference between treatments in either of the two goat herds nor the sheep flock. However, several pounds can make a big difference with small ruminants!

TABLE 2. Final hanging weights in Fagan & Breckbill's trial

Hanging weight (lb)	
Castrated at 1-4 weeks old	31
Castrated at 6-8 weeks old	28
Difference	3
Significantly different?	No

TABLE 3: Kid weights and Average Daily Gain (ADG) for Ledvina's trial.

	4-week weight (lb)	12-week weight (lb)	Average gain (lb), 4 weeks to 12 weeks	ADG (lb/day), 4 weeks to 12 weeks
Not Castrated	18	49	31	0.51
Castrated at 4 weeks old	22	55	33	0.54
Castrated at 8 weeks old	18	47	30	0.47
Significantly Different?	--	--	No	No

TABLE 4: Kid weights and ADG for Lutz's trial.

	8-week weight (lb)	Weight at time of sale (lb)	Gain (lb), 8 weeks to time of sale	ADG (lb/day), 8 weeks to time of sale
Castrated at about 8 weeks old	19	63	44	0.29
Castrated at about 12 weeks old	17	52	35	0.23
Difference	2	11	9	0.06
Significantly different?	--	--	No	No

What are your goals?

- Growth rate of kid/lamb
 - Data says there's **no significant difference in gains** based on when you castrate
 - Achieve same weights by same dates
- Market expectations
 - Conformation (shape/distribution of weight) differs based on timing and method
 - Broader necked/shouldered animal with later castration and short scrotum castration
 - More “even” distribution of muscling with earlier castration and full scrotum castration
 - Values differ with your customers
- Herd/flock dynamics & management
 - Early maturity, risk of unplanned breeding!
 - Hormones between intact males
- Effectiveness & peace of mind
 - Good practice to double check burdizzo
 - Banding often yields visually obvious success

Methods available



Burdizzo

South Africa Mohair
Growers Association



Banding

Premier1



Scrotum after banding at
four weeks, about a week
after banding

Surgical castration –
performed by making an
incision in the scrotum and
removing each testicle

Chemical castration –
injection of one of three
main chemicals into the
testicle, causing
inflammation and
destroying function

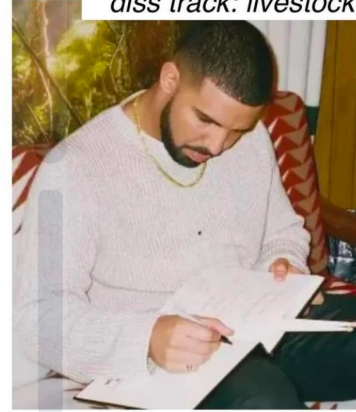
Preferred method

✨ Banding – full scrotum ✨

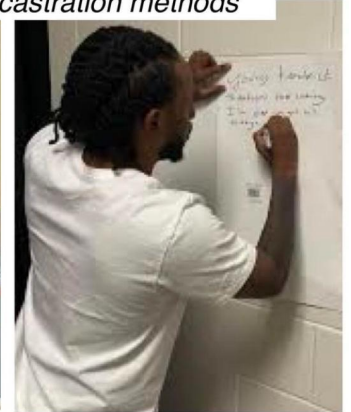
- Assurance (there's nothing there)
- Clean (compared to surgical)
 - Timing is key – size of scrotum and point in the season (flies!)
- Easy (compared to chemical and surgical)
- Cost (pennies per band plus your time)
- Conformation (compared to short scrotum)



diss track: livestock castration methods



u r a
rubber
band



You are a
Burdizzo clamp

Conformation, quickly



Timing

- **Comfort**
 - Less developed, less painful – the longer you wait, the more pain management to consider/implement
 - Scalpel and blood?
- **Safety and ease**
 - Easier handling when younger
 - Larger kids/lambs require more handling and infrastructure
- **Health/cleanliness**
 - Later castration or more invasive methods when flies are abundant can lead to complications
 - Immunity from mother's vaccinations (clostridium and tetanus)
- **Conformation**
 - Less time for hormonal development, less buck/ram-like appearance

When have I castrated?

2020 6 weeks (banding)

2021 12 weeks (burdizzo)

2022 4-6 weeks (banding)

2023 8 or 12 weeks (banding)

2024 4 weeks (banding)

2025 Birth (banding) – labor, comfort of kids, avoiding oopsie bucklings



2025 castration

Banding (and tagging) at birth

Partner farm asks for wethers younger than one year

Combination barn kidding in February and pasture kidding in May

No retained bucklings for assessment or breeding, no oopsies either (do not want to secure a market, do not want to manage those herd dynamics)



You have options!