



FARM ANIMAL CARE TREND WATCH

SHEEP TAIL DOCKING

Farm & Food Care has a mandate to help build public trust in food and farming. An important part of farmers' and our sector's commitment to public trust includes advancing responsible farm animal care.

Tail docking is a commonly practiced procedure on some Canadian livestock farms. In Canada, farmers are expected to be proactive and follow the Code of Practice tail docking requirements to prevent animal welfare concerns for the animals and a negative image for the industry.

CASE STUDY: STATE FAIR (USA) – SUMMER 2015

- Fair rules dictate that to qualify for exhibit market lambs must be docked such that the tail (dock) is healed and can be lifted from the exterior. Lambs that have no dock (tail) will not be eligible.
- A State Fair Executive was quoted in major media about proactive animal care at the fair, including no tail docking of sheep

Every market lamb shown at the fair had no tail (as pictured here).

WHAT HAPPENED?

Shortly docked sheep or no tail at all became the show lamb norm for at least this region. This contravened the fair rules, reflected badly on the exhibition and the media message they were promoting about positive animal care and in Canada would be contrary to the industry agreed upon Code of Practice.

This is a trend that we do not want to see move to Canada.



Market lamb at a State Fair. This lamb would not meet the Fair rules or the Canadian Code of Practice requirement for tail docking length.



IN CANADA

Requirements are clearly outlined in the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Sheep regarding tail docking. The requirements state that:

- The decision to tail dock must be based on a welfare risk/benefit analysis rather than as a routine; the basis for this decision should be part of the flock health and welfare plan.
- Docked tails must cover the vulva in ewes and the equivalent length in rams. Tails must be docked no shorter than the distal end of the caudal fold, as is pictured here.

Outside of the above requirements, recommended best practices for tail docking include:

- Base the decision to tail dock on a welfare risk/benefit analysis rather than doing out of routine; the basis for this decision should be part of the flock health and welfare plan.
- Tail dock using rubber rings should be performed between 24 hours – 7 days of age.
- Use the hot iron method when and where ever possible.
- Administer pain relieving drugs (anesthetics and/or analgesics) when and where ever possible.
- Consider performing tail docking and castration at the same time.



AT FAIRS & EXHIBITIONS

Many shows, both open and 4-H, have rules related to animal care and often reference the Code of Practice or industry standards. For example, the Royal Winter Fair outlines in the rule book for livestock exhibitors that all market lambs, shown in single classes or in groups, must be slick shorn, and must be docked, properly altered (no testicles or cord present), washed and clean.

WHY PROACTIVELY DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS?

- Upholding the credibility of the Code of Practice. Tail docking length and practice is clearly outlined in the Code of Practice. Failing to abide by the requirements in the Code creates doubt to the integrity and value of the Code.
- Upholding the credibility of fair or show rules and/or 4-H club requirements.
- By not following our industry Code of Practice, we're providing negative examples for critics and activists to use against animal agriculture. This reflects badly on farmers and the industry.
- Sheep farmers care for their animals 365 days a year. Farmers know it's the right thing to do for the welfare of the animals. Let's be sure that message is communicated and our actions back up the message.



ACTION ITEMS

You can help to spread this proactive message through the following action items:

- Be sure to include items related to the Code of Practice overall or tail docking specifically in the livestock rule book for your event, sheep producers meetings and 4-H clubs. Update it to be consistent with the most recent Code of Practice.
- Sending a letter to your exhibitors or members referencing the rules, why they are important and what enforcement will happen if exhibitors or members aren't in compliance. .
- Enforce the rules and follow up with consequences such as being disqualified from the show or sale, as outlined in the rules. As with other example issues, it's incredibly effective to enforce the rules when it's one outlier versus once something becomes a trend and every lamb shows up with no tail.

RELATED RESOURCES

A full copy of the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Sheep can be found at www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/sheep

www.farmIMPACT.ca is the home for Farm & Food Care's animal care program IMPACT.

Farm & Food Care Ontario is a coalition of farmers, agriculture and food partners proactively working together to ensure public trust and confidence in food and farming. Farm & Food Care provides a coordinated approach and credible information on food and farming in Ontario. For more information visit www.farmfoodcare.org

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Farm & Food Care Ontario
info@farmfoodcare.org
(519) 837 – 1326

Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency
admin@ontariosheep.org
(519) 836 – 0043