



The Ugly Part of Farm Life

Uzzi and I are feeling sorry for Smoke and Baarley, the ram lambs born this spring.

Martok

Monday, August 24, 2009

Sue Weaver

Smoke as a lamb. Uzzi and I are feeling sorry for Smoke and Baarley, the ram lambs born this spring. Mom and Dad banded them yesterday. Now they'll be fleece wethers instead of rams.

Banding is when humans use a tool called an elastrator to put a strong latex band around a lamb or kid's scrotum to castrate him. Most people do this when lambs or kids are tiny but Mom and Dad wait until they're several months old.

They wait because male goats and sheep are prone to a very serious ailment called urinary calculi. That means mineral stones can get lodged in their urinary tracts and it sometimes happens if a buckling or ram lamb is castrated too young because then his urethra stops growing and it's too skinny to pass mineral stones.

If a stone forms and then gets stuck, he can't pass urine or he only dribbles a little bit. It's very painful, so he stretches out and tries very hard to pee and he cries and cries. Then, if he isn't treated (and sometimes even if he is), his bladder bursts and fills his belly with urine. Then he dies.

Sue Weaver

Smoke as an adult Urinary calculi is a deadly, scary thing, so people who want their wethers to live a long time wait until they're somewhat mature to have them castrated (five or six months is best).

Usually they have a vet castrate them surgically but our farm vets think anesthetic isn't important. After just once having a vet do it his way, Mom emphatically disagrees.

So, when it's time, Mom holds the kid or lamb and Dad injects Lidocaine (a numbing anesthetic they get from our horses' vet) around his scrotum. They wait awhile and then put on the band, making sure both testicles are descended and the kid or lamb's nipples aren't below the band.

After that, they give him Banamine (a prescription veterinary pain killer) for several days. In ten days or so his scrotum is very shriveled and dry. Then Dad uses a scalpel to cut it off below the band.

Not every part of farm life is fun. Mom and Dad hate this job but it's an important part of keeping wethers on our farm (between the rams and me and the goat and sheep wethers, there are 22 of us and in six years no one has gotten urinary calculi yet!).

We also drink a lot of clean water (that's important) and eat a diet that helps prevent stones—but that's a topic for another blog!

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