



DISBUDDING & DEHORNING OF ORGANIC CATTLE

Guidance

Cattle are dehorned because it significantly decreases the risk of injury to farm workers, horses, dogs and other cattle. Dehorned animals are far easier to handle and transport, and command higher prices at auction than animals with horns.

The American Veterinary Medical Association recommends dehorning at the earliest age practicable. Young calves tend to recover quicker and have fewer complications than calves dehorned at an older age. It is generally accepted that the younger the animal, the less painful the procedure is.

DEFINITIONS

- *Disbudding* is destroying the horn-producing cells (corium) of the horn bud. Horn buds are removed without opening the frontal sinus. Chemical and hot-iron disbudding methods destroy the horn-producing cells, whereas physical methods of disbudding excise them. Disbudding is performed before the horns have formed on the horn bud.
- *Dehorning* is removing the horns after they have formed from the horn bud.

NOP REGULATIONS AND PCO POLICY

Dehorning and disbudding of organic livestock is considered a physical alteration and according to the livestock health care standard at §205.238, performance of physical alterations is allowed as needed to promote the animal's welfare and in a manner that minimizes pain and stress. The following information applies to organic cattle. Please contact PCO if you have other livestock (i.e. goats or sheep) that you would like dehorning information on.

The use of pain management practices is required during any dehorning or disbudding procedure at any age. This may include selecting a disbudding or dehorning procedure that is less painful or performing the procedure at a time that is less stressful to the animal. Any materials or medication must be approved by PCO before use (please note: all dehorning pastes are currently prohibited). If dehorning during warmer months, it is important to use an approved fly repellent and check calves frequently to prevent fly strike. Using polled genetics for breeding is an option for avoiding the need for dehorning.

Up to 3 months of age:

- **May** disbud or dehorn with any method approved by PCO (e.g. cutting, gouging, burning, banding). If you want to use saws or wires, the procedure must be performed in consultation with a veterinarian (documentation required) and must be reviewed and approved by PCO prior to use. It will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- **Must** use pain management practices that minimize pain and stress.
- **May** use allowed pain management medications.

3 to 6 months of age:

- **May** dehorn with any vet-recommended method. **Must** have consulted with a veterinarian and have documentation on file of this communication (i.e. written procedure, letter from vet). If you want to use

saws or wires, the procedure must be reviewed and approved by PCO prior to use. It will be considered on a on a case-by-case basis.

- **Must** use pain management practices that minimize pain and stress.
- **Must** use an allowed pain management medication **for surgical procedures**. Pain management medication is not required for non-surgical procedures (ex. banding).

After 6 months of age:

- **May** dehorn with any vet-recommended method. **Must** have consulted with a veterinarian and have documentation on file of this communication (i.e. written procedure, letter from vet). If you want to use saws or wires, the procedure must be reviewed and approved by PCO prior to use. It will be considered on a on a case-by-case basis.
- **Must** use pain management practices that minimize pain and stress.
- Surgical procedures, excluding the use of saws and wires, **must** be performed by a veterinarian. **Must** use an allowed pain management medication for surgical procedures. Pain management medication is not required for non-surgical procedures.

APPROVED INPUTS

All inputs must be reviewed and approved by PCO prior to use, so be sure to check with us or consult a current PCO Approved Materials List, OMRI, or WSDA list prior to purchasing or using a product. PCO does not endorse any of the products listed in this guidance document. This is not an all-inclusive list and other inputs may be allowed. Please contact PCO if you have any questions on materials or restrictions.

- **Aspirin Bolus** by IBA, Durvet, Sparhawk Laboratories, Agri Laboratories, Aspen Veterinary Resources, Vedco, Butler Schein Animal Health, and Leedstone
- **Dull-It Tincture** by Dr. Paul's Lab
- **Lidocaine** is allowed for use as a local anesthetic. Use of lidocaine requires a meat withdrawal period of at least 8 days after administering to livestock intended for slaughter and a milk discard period of at least 6 days after administering to dairy animals. §205.603(b)(4)
- **Xylazine (Rompum)** is permitted for use in routine dehorning procedures as a sedative by or on the lawful written or oral order of a licensed veterinarian. Use of xylazine does require a meat withdrawal period of at least 8 days after administering to livestock intended for slaughter; and a milk discard period of at least 4 days after administering to dairy animals.

PCO is not endorsing the efficacy of any of the approved treatments, and producers should work with a trained professional to treat any distressed animals.

RESOURCES

- <http://articles.extension.org/pages/67231/organic-dairy-herd-health:-reproductive-management-from-breeding-through-freshening>