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Castration of Beef Calves Needs to be Done Early

There is perception among some cow-calf producers that it is better to delay castration on bull calves to get heavier calves. Other producers prefer not to deal with the job of castration.

Research indicates that early castrated and implanted calves will gain as well as bull calves prior to weaning. Calves that are castrated and not implanted may weigh less than calves left as bulls or castrated and implanted steer calves. Castration of calves at a young age is less stressful with less discomfort on the calf and easier on the people doing the castrating.

Many farms like to work all the calves at the same time. On a commercial cow-calf beef farm with a 60-day calving season, this could be done after the last calves are born, and the oldest calves would be about 2 months old. At this age, the stress would be minimized and the calves would still be relatively easier to handle compared to castrating them at 600 pounds. It is best to have the calves castrated before they reach 3 months of age, and baby calves are the easiest to handle. Another option is to make it part of the routine at birth for newborn calves when they are eartagged and checked over.

It is best to castrate before the hot summer months and fly season, but avoid doing it on cold wet days to prevent calves from lying in the mud with a fresh wound. Knife method, also called surgical, is the recommended method because the results are positive. Several alliance, branded and certified health programs also require early knife castration of calves. Many of these programs have nice premiums for those calves that meet the qualifications. When using the knife method you have proof positive that the job is completed correctly, and there are less adverse health risks regarding tetanus, screw worms and flies compared to the other methods.