

Chemical Dehorning

Caustic chemicals will prevent the growth of horns when properly applied to the horn buds of new-born (less than one to three weeks of age) calves. The chemical destroys the horn-producing cells around the horn bud. The chemicals are available as sticks or pastes (Figure 2). To protect yourself, wear gloves when applying the chemicals. To protect the calf, avoid application near its eyes. Do not use caustics in rainy weather. We use Dr. Naylor's Dehorning Paste. Extreme caution needs to be used with this product. With that said...this works great!

Items Needed:

1 container of Dr. Naylor's Dehorning Paste, 1 Wooden Applicator, scissors, rubber gloves, disposable rag,



Figure 2. Dehorning paste is a caustic chemical applied to horn buds to destroy horn-producing cells.

Technique

1. Arrange items in orderly fashion within arms reach. Secure the calf.
2. Expose the horn bud (about the size of a 5-cent piece) by pushing the hair back (Figure 3). Trim hair as short as possible about the size of a quarter around the horn bud with scissors. Scuff or scrape the horn slightly if it is broken through the skin. Don't scrape the skin.
3. Put on rubber gloves and then apply the caustic paste carefully to the horn button. Use a wooden applicator. Apply a thin layer. Cover the horn bud completely but do not exceed the area past the circle base of the horn. This is roughly the size of a nickel on a Dexter calf about 3 weeks old. Make sure to apply evenly and thinly covering the total horn bud, yet not going out past the base of the horn where it meets the skin. Be very careful and take your time.
4. Make sure no other areas are touched by the paste including yourself.
5. Keep calf separated from cow approximately 6 hours. We usually keep the calf tied in the shade for that time period and carefully watch them during this time period. Make

sure they are not wiping the paste off or spreading it to other places. It will become irritating within a few minutes and subsides after awhile.

6. Protect the calf and the cow from accidental caustic burns. One method is to place a patch of duct tape over each horn bud. We have tried that and don't like it. It makes the paste spread out over too large of an area. We prefer just keeping them separate for 6 hours or until the paste becomes somewhat dry and quits burning.
7. In some countries, the technique is only permitted in calves less than eight days of age.
8. Before turning calf out to cow, spray both areas with wound protector.

Advantages and Disadvantages

- performed at a young age with less stress than some other techniques
- bloodless-when done correctly
- use in any season
- somewhat painful without anaesthesia, but not as painful as dehorning an actual horn
- avoid contact with eyes; operator should wear gloves
- do not use in rainy weather
- horns or scurs follow improper technique, be careful, take your time



Figure 3. The circle at the base of the ear shows the location of the horn bud in a young calf. The horn bud is readily visible after pushing back the hair. On Dexter bull calves the horns are more on the side of the head nearer the ear. On Dexter heifer calves the buds are more on the top. Feel around and you can tell.

I am not a vet. This is an explanation of what we do on our farm.