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Catch 'Em

*Young For Best
Dehorning*

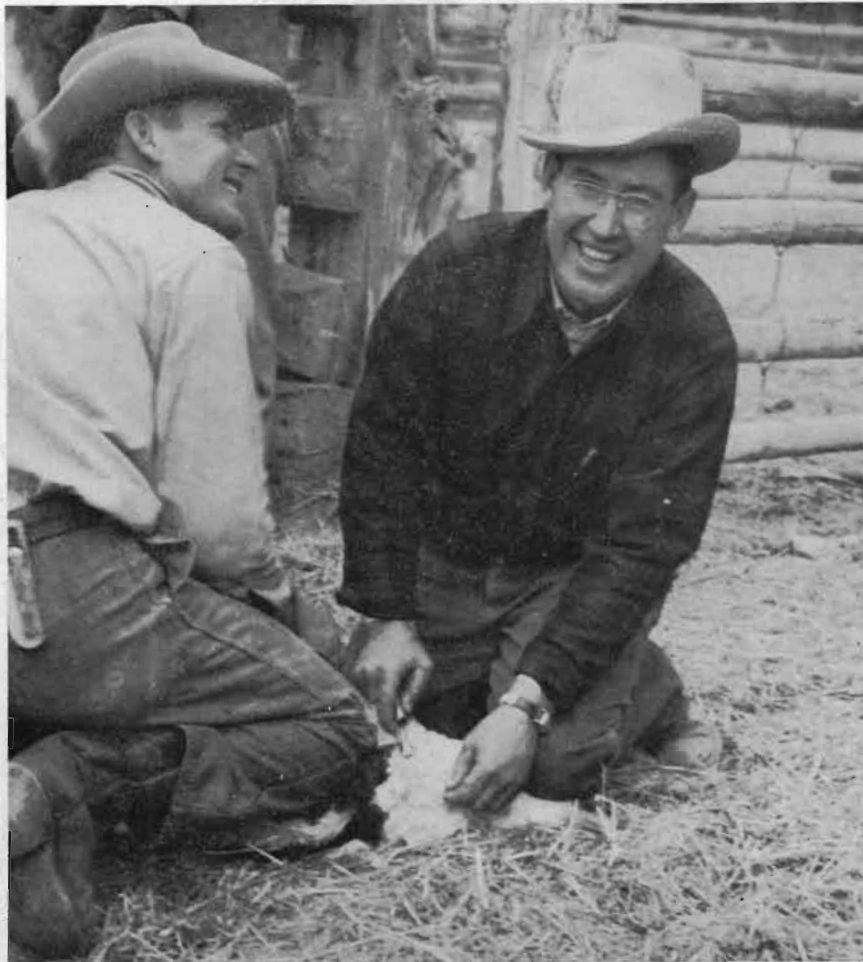


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Catch 'Em Young For Best Dehorning Results

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Willard Rhodes, Cody, has just removed a "button".

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Catch 'Em Young For Best Dehorning Results

By Tony Fellhauer*

More and more beef cattle have been dehorned as young calves during the last few years than ever before. What has caused cattlemen to switch to early dehorning? The principal reason is that methods have been developed for early removal that are practical for the range operator to use and which give excellent results. Another reason is that producers are giving more attention to the production of top quality feeders; and attractive clean heads are an important consideration.

Nowadays, horns on commercial cattle have no real use, and if they are allowed to grow, they cause certain losses to the producers and are a nuisance. When horns are removed while they are very small and immature, they become a rather insignificant problem. What should be an important consideration, although some stockmen may not concern themselves with the humane angle, is that the smaller the horn growths, the easier the dehorning operation is on the animal. For many years some stockmen have realized these advantages and have developed and used practical means of removing horn growths while they are very immature.

Ranchers who still "saw them off" or "crush them off" their yearlings or two-year-olds and do a good job as far as removing the horns and getting no regrowths are concerned may wonder



Dehorning demonstration at the Wallis Brothers' ranch, Parkman. Dave Wallis is using the tube and Sheridan County Agent Dan Ingraham is holding the front leg of calf.

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Dehorning tube is used by County Agent Ben Kohrs on Lee Mankin ranch, Gillette.

why the horns should be removed at calf branding time or sooner. The answer is obvious when one considers that the horn growth on a young calf is only a button that has just started to develop and is not yet grown solid to the head.

Horn growths on beef calves from the time they are born until they are from three to three and a half months old are not much more than skin appendages. These small horns, when they are grasped between the fingers, can be moved about slightly. Therefore, removal at this stage does not involve the skull, but simply the skin in which the horns or so-called buttons are floating. The blood vessels leading to these buttons are very small and threadlike. The result is a very small, clean wound that heals rapidly. Because the operation leaves no decayed flesh, there is little danger from the type of flies found in Wyoming.

On the other hand, by fall or winter, the horns have become a part of the skull, and removing them requires a much more severe operation. When the horns are from four to eight inches thick, the blood vessels are three times larger, and measures often have to be taken to stop hemorrhages when these horns are removed. It is even more dangerous to remove large horns during fly season because of the large cut and the opening into the sinus, both of which give more opportunity for infection and for the development of maggots. Older cattle shrink more because of the shock and bleeding, and so extra feed and time are required to get them back to normal. Now and then an older animal is lost because of infection or excessive bleeding. Most of these losses to the owner can be eliminated by early dehorning.

METHODS

Several methods are used to remove the horn growths from calves. Some ranchers use dehorning paste, which, for best results, should be applied to the horn area when the calves are from one to 15 days old. Dehorning paste, if properly applied, is very effective in preventing the growth of the horns. However, some ranchers say that it is not practical because it is necessary to have extra help to catch every calf on the range and apply the paste at the proper age.

Another method is to remove the buttons at branding time when all calves are gathered and handled anyway. Pocket knives were used by a few before special instruments were made for this purpose. The dehorning spoon has been used a great deal and is still in use. A newer and improved instrument is the so-called dehorning tube. The tubes can be used at branding time and therefore no extra handling or gathering of the cattle is required. It's a darn nice feelin' next fall and winter to know that the dehorning job has been taken care of!

USE OF DEHORNING TUBES

The tubes are easy to use and are effective, as there is seldom any regrowth. The tubes are an improvement over the spoon because there is less chance of leaving a portion of the horn that will grow. They are faster and less tiresome, and it is easier to acquire the necessary skill to do an excellent job.

These tubes come in four sizes (see Figure), varying in diameter from $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch for the smallest to $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches for the largest. It is a good idea to purchase a complete set because all sizes will be needed if many calves are to be dehorned.



W. D. Sidley, Encampment, with a uniform group of young calves ready to be branded, dehorned, etc.

The operation is simple. Use the size tube that fits over the

base of the horn plus about one-eighth of an inch of skin all the way around. Place the cutting edge straight down over the horn, push down and twist, first one way and then the other, until the skin has been cut through. The depth of the cut required to loosen the skin all the way around and get out the horn button will vary from about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch for calves only a few

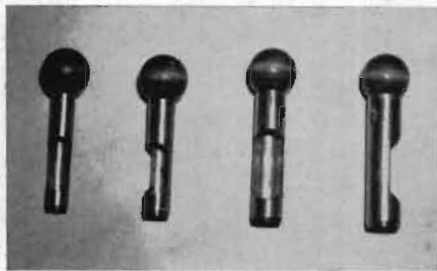


Figure. Set of dehorning tubes.

days old to almost $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch for the calves around three months of age. Usually a cut about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch deep on calves from one to three months of age will do the job. After the skin has been cut, turn the tube to about a 45-degree angle and shove and turn the cutting edge until the button comes off. Remember to keep turning the tube back and forth rapidly as the button is shoved or cut off. With a little practice, a person can do the job in just a very few seconds. If the operation is properly done, the buttons "pop out" very easily.

It is important that the tubes be kept sharp. If they are dull it is difficult to cut the skin loose all the way around, and there is a lot of fuss in trying to shove the button off. The outside of the tubes should be kept ground down. The writer has found that a steel is very effective to use on the inside edge.

RANCHERS LIKE DEHORNING TUBES

The author has always felt that horn growths should be removed as early as a practical method could be used under range conditions. After using the dehorning tubes for several years on Wyoming ranchers' calves at branding time and observing the methods and results ranchers obtained who followed this method, we were convinced that this is a practical way to do the job and do it well. As mentioned previously, some cattlemen have been using these tubes for many years and their use is not original with the author.

To encourage early dehorning and to give producers who have not followed this practice an opportunity to see the tubes in use and check results, the Wyoming Agricultural Extension Service has held dehorning demonstrations in most counties of the state during the last five or six years. Our records show that last year 149 ranchers started using tubes for the first time, and they dehorned 27,150 calves at branding time. This, of course, does not include ranchers who started using this method in previous years. It is estimated that this year a good majority of Wyoming cattle will be dehorned as young calves.

Last year companies which make these tubes could not keep their supply up with their orders. Many requests for information and tubes also came in from surrounding states as a result of articles in livestock journals and other publicity explaining this method and its advantages.

As with everything new, there have been complaints that the dehorning tubes do not work satisfactorily. Some have said they are too slow. This problem is easily solved by a little practice in the use of the tubes. And if it does take one more man at branding time, it's still a saving from working the cattle again next winter.

There have been instances of excessive bleeding. This however, was probably caused by either going too deep with the tubes or because the calves were heated up.



One of the Sidelley calves on a calf table. The calf has just been branded, and Carbon County Agent Nels Dahlquist is removing horns with a tube.



Note attractive clean heads of these fat cattle (Reserve Champion Load at Denver Livestock Show, January, 1946). Bred and tube dehorned by Warren Livestock Company, Cheyenne.

SUMMARY OF ADVANTAGES OF EARLY DEHORNING

1. Less loss and shrinkage; therefore, a definite saving in animals and feed to the cattleman.
2. More humane for the cattle.
3. Better results—no regrowths or nubbins if dehorning tubes are properly used.
4. More attractive heads. Quicker sales and higher prices for feeder cattle.
5. Less handling—less labor. Use of tubes at branding time saves one handling of cattle.