



Farmnote

Mulesing for flystrike control

By S.G. Gherardi, Research Officer, South Perth and M. Seymour, Veterinary Officer, Moora

Summary

Describes mulesing procedure in details, including two line drawings which illustrate the process step by step for [tailstripping](#) and [mulesing](#).

Mulesing to control fly strike in sheep is common practice in Western Australia and wool growers are usually paid more at sales for suitably mulesed than unmulesed sheep.

Mulesing involves surgical removal of wool-bearing skin from the crutch area, and is best done at lamb marking, or following shearing or crutching of weaners. When the cuts heal, the natural bare area around the vulva and anus is stretched and enlarged. This reduces dampness caused by sweating, urine and faecal staining, and so minimizes susceptibility to flystrike.

The 'V' mules is recommended Australia-wide for prevention of sheep blowfly strike. Sheep of any breed and either sex, wrinkly or plain, can and should be mulesed. The size of the mules should be increased proportionate to the degree of wrinkle or the size of grown sheep.

There were two forms of the operation - the modified and the radical mules. The modified mules gave way to the radical mules which in turn evolved into a fairly severe operation.

Unfortunately this extra stretching at the sides of the vulva caused it to be pulled partially open, exposing tender tissue to ultraviolet light resulting in an increase in incidence of vulval cancer. Short tails were generally a feature of the radical mules and without the tail long enough to shade the vulva, the cancer problem was even more pronounced.

Trials began in 1977 to investigate ways of reducing the

Click on images for larger view

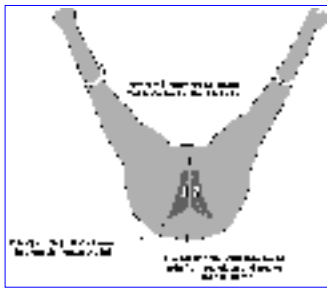


Figure 1. Tailstripping.

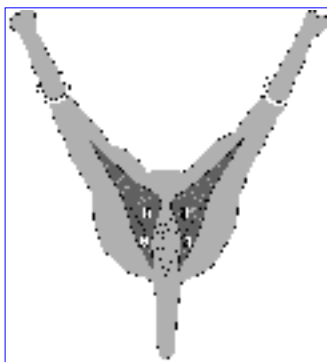


Figure 2. Mulesing.

incidence of vulval and/or tail-end cancer and it was determined that the site from which wool-bearing skin was removed was more critical than the size of the mules in the prevention of breech-strike.

At the same time, a longer tail (minimum third apparent joint) was retained to shade the vulva. However, it soon became obvious that this long, bare (tail-stripped) tail was highly susceptible to continuous sunburn which would lead to skin cancer in many cases.

The current 'V' mules method leaves the sheep less prone to these problems. A V-shaped piece of wool-bearing skin is left extending 3 cm from the base of the tail (in sheep mulesed as young lambs). In high rainfall areas this 'V' may need to be shortened to 1.5 cm.

For best results:

- Mules and tailstrip all sheep and lambs at the earliest opportunity.
- To minimise mismothering, mules lambs in their own paddocks.
- Operate in temporary yards on clean ground. Collect and destroy all pieces of skin daily. To reduce risk of disease, do not mules in old yards or pens.
- To avoid losses from bleeding, allow lambs to settle down before marking or mulesing. Do not begin operations with lambs still hot from droving.
- Keep shears sharp for cleaner wounds and easier operation.
- To assist healing, start and finish all cuts with a sharp 'V'.
- Tailstrip when mulesing, leaving a 'V' shaped projection of wool-bearing skin 3 cm down the top surface of the tail. (1.5 cm in high rainfall areas).
- Ensure the widest part of the mulesing wound is located to achieve maximum stretch in the susceptible area beside and below the vulva. Making two cuts on each side helps accuracy, particularly on larger, woolly lambs.
- Keep mulesing cuts [3 and 5](#) (see diagram) close to the bare skin alongside and under the vulva.
- Avoid cutting into any bare skin when mulesing.
- Immerse shears and knives in disinfectant between lambs.
- If flies are active, treat wool next to the wound with a flystrike dressing before releasing sheep.

- To aid recovery and reduce dust infection, avoid droving after the operation.

Tailstripping

This step (cuts 1 and 2) involves the removal of wool-bearing skin from the tail. Start each cut at the base and to the side of the tail to facilitate leaving a V-shaped projection of wool-bearing skin 1.5 cm to 3.0 cm down the tail.

Remove all wool-bearing skin from the rest of the tail to a point beyond that at which the tail is to be docked.

Do not cut any bare skin from under the tail or cut into the tissue of the tail, as this can produce tail abnormalities.

Mulesing

The first cut of the 'mules' (cut 3) begins next to the bare skin beside the vulva. Keep as close to the bare skin as possible but do not cut any bare skin. Extend the cut, 3 to 4 cm beyond the bare area under the vulva while turning the blades to aim the points just inside the right hock.

Finish the cut in a tapering 'V' slightly less than halfway to the hock. If the cut reaches the point at which the leg bends, healing will be delayed.

Start cut 4 at the same point as cut 2 of the tailstrip, skirt the bare area to join up with cut 3 and ensure a total wound width of 5 to 7 cm.

Cuts 5 and 6 should be a mirror image of cuts 3 and 4.

To assist healing and avoid ragged edges make all mulesing cuts with a sliding action rather than ansnipping action.


Although it may be common practice to combine cuts 3 and 4 (or 5 and 6) in one, this sacrifices accuracy. The two cuts are recommended for accuracy and this justifies the extra time that may be required.

Disclaimer: This material has been written for Western Australian conditions. Its availability does not imply suitability to other areas, and any interpretation or use is the responsibility of the user. Mention of product or trade names does not imply recommendation, and any omissions are unintentional. Recommendations were current at the time of preparation of the original publication.

This file: F04696.HTM **Date converted:** 20 Nov. 1997

© Copyright Chief Executive Officer, Agriculture Western Australia, 1997

**Prime Notes
Index**

A rectangular button with a light orange gradient and a slight shadow, containing the word "Search" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

Search

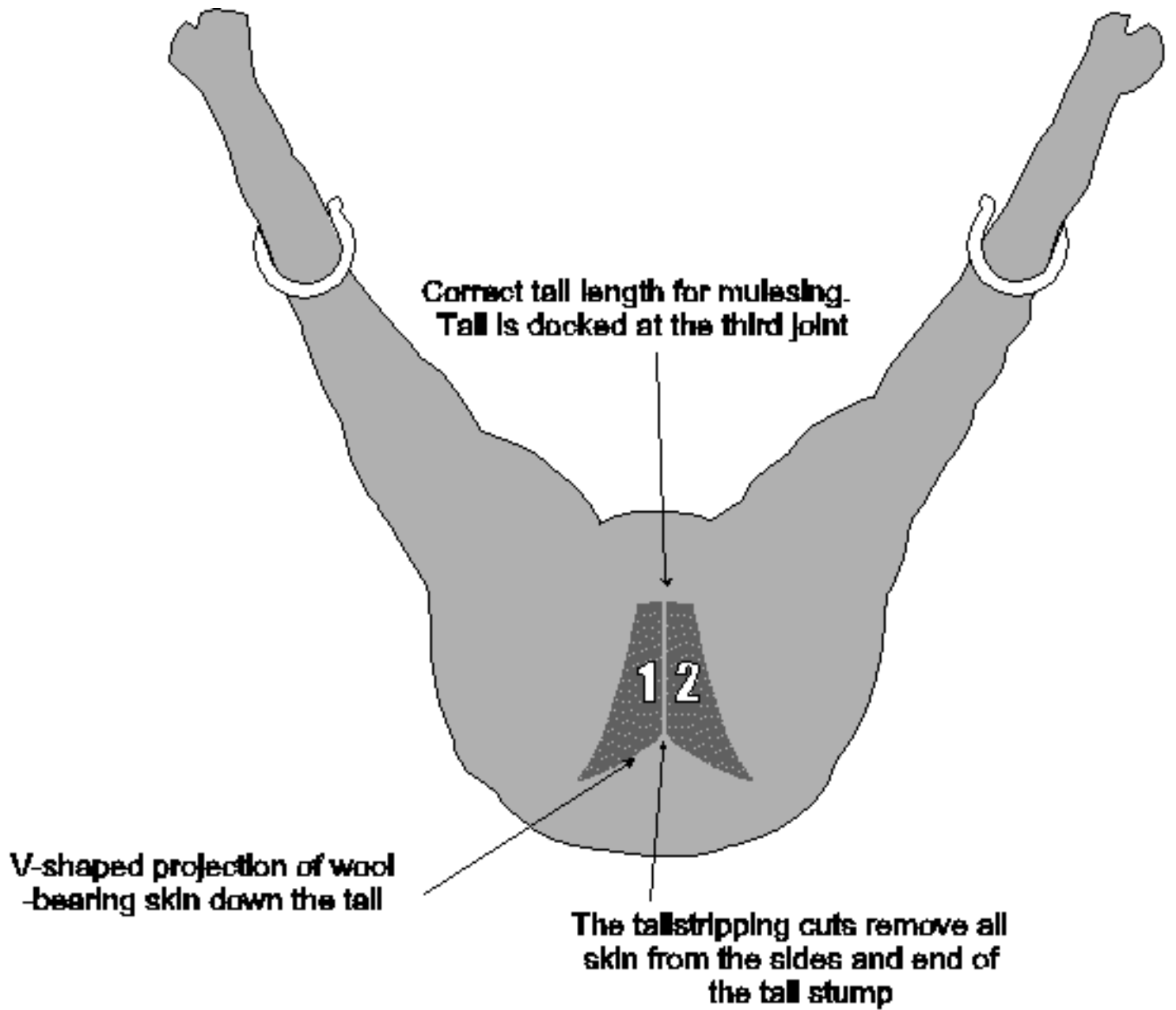


Figure 1. Tailstripping.



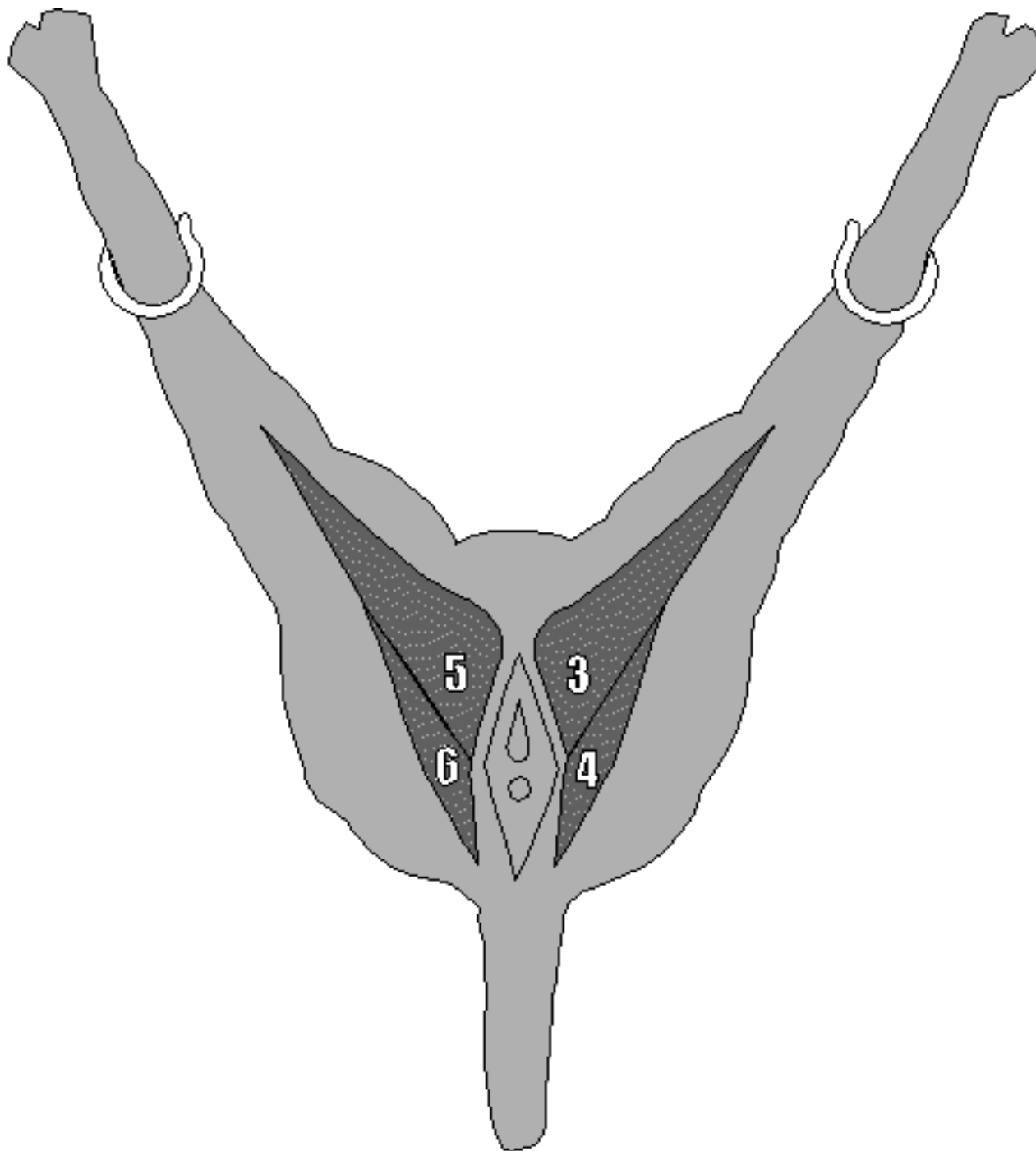


Figure 2. Mulesing.

