

WHY CASTRATION IS NECESSARY. By Josh Wendland, ALBC Master Breeder, Technical Advisor to the RWHA

Castration is a necessary minor surgical procedure done for thousands of years since animals were domesticated. It simply put is the removal of the testicles in the male animals to improve growth rate and meat quality. It is also essential to the managing of breeding stock by only leaving the best animals intact.

WHAT HAPPENS IF CASTRATION IS NOT PERFORMED? Boars left untouched develop large amounts of testosterone and this promotes the body to go into a breeding first mode. Which not only taints the meat but makes the animal more interested in breeding then growing. Also since the meat is not edible the salvage value is minimal.

IS BOAR TAIN REAL? Absolutely! While some may claim Red Wattles do not carry it or if a boar is not around females or been put into service do not carry the taint. I find this very rare and not consistent. It is definitely not worth the risk of ruining the product or losing a customer. There is a lot of money tied up in an animal by the time it is fattened and processed to have to dispose of the meat.

WHEN TO CASTRATE? AWA and a lot of welfare certifications demand within the first two weeks. However, I do not find fault in doing it at weaning in severe cold. I prefer not to remove the pigs from the sow to get them chilled and sometimes weather doesn't permit at other times of the year. Breeding stock is first selected at birth with individuals definitely not being kept being castrated. At weaning is the second round of selection for boars. This is where later castration is necessary. And I try to have other cuts done ASAP - definitely by the time the boar is at the 200 pound range. After 200 pounds the animal starts to take on the taint and it takes time to get that out of the system and to heal the incisions.

WHEN IS A HOG TOO BIG TO CASTRATE? After the 200 pound mark it starts to get hard on the animal and hard on the person (and helper) performing the task. I do it with just a little help and a sturdy gate to squeeze them behind. That being said, the cull boar price probably won't pay for your fuel to get rid of him. I have a neighbor who made good money buying old boars castrating them and letting them heal. Then would put weight on them as they healed (this can take a long time, and some may never heal or die) once they healed he would again sell them and receive good sow price. This is not easy but an option. I look at it that he gave me lots of pigs and doesn't owe me a lot of money and I usually sell my old boars.

Technique: I usually hold baby pigs between my knees while kneeling on the ground. Weanling pigs and up to 50# I turn the pig upside down and put one leg under me and let one go straight out while sitting on pig. Larger pigs will require a helper to hold down animal. I use disposable curved bladed scalpels. The ones I use are blue and about 3 inches long tip to tip. The incision needs to be made towards the bottom of the scrotum so the cavity can drain as the animal heals. Some people do only one incision but I usually make one for each testicle. Push the testicle to make it tight in scrotum, this allows it to stay in position and not float while cutting. I usually cut into the testicle when making the incision to go through all membranes at the same time popping testicle out of the hole. Pull on testicle to expose cord. While pulling I apply the knife to the cord to aid in tearing. Repeat on the other side.

The pigs immune system is amazing I don't know that I have ever had a hog die of infection, a lot of the times I don't treat small pigs up to weaning with any antiseptic I just let the draining do the cleansing. (Bleeding and draining last for a very short time, and very little blood is lost.) For the larger pigs I use a product called Vetericyn VF wound treatment and have had good and fast healing.

Animal welfare: Pigs and all livestock for that matter, have a lot fewer nerves and pain receptors than humans, If it was for not being restrained I truly believe pigs would not squeal when being castrated. The fact that they are being held or sat on is frustrating to them and sparks the survival instincts to squeal and run away. There are not a lot of things to give a hog to for anesthesia. I believe most drugs are toxic to swine. There are aspirin type meds or anti-inflammatories but I truly believe none of this is necessary.

We must remember the separation between livestock (food source) and humans. These animals are man made by human selection and breeding. The only reason they exist is to meet our food needs. While we enjoy them and ensure they have the happiest and healthiest lives possible. Their true purpose must be kept in mind. We are to be in dominion over the animals and good stewards of our resources.

Complications: The biggest thing to watch for is a rupture into the testicles. This is when the intestines breakthrough into the scrotum and will be a major problem if cut open, they will spill out and cause irreversible damage. If you detect extra bulges or round full scrotum get a second opinion before cutting. Castration can still be performed by a vet or other experienced person as some stitching will need to be done.