Docking a lamb to leave three Coccygeal Vertebrae
(Providing a legal tail dock for Wyoming State Fair – 2006)

Disclaimer
The following material was created to help UW 4-H extension personnel with interpretation of the new State Fair docking rule. This material is for reference only and is only attempting to interpret the Wyoming State Fair rule at the time of composition. The author has no opinion on what the tail docking rule should or should not be!!

Explanation
The goal was to provide visual materials to help identify the proper docking point. The process used to find the sacro-coccygeal joint and count vertebrae to the proper dock point is documented and supported with x-ray evidence. To illustrate the sacro-coccygeal joint location, a needle was inserted at the joint between the sacral and coccygeal vertebra and a corresponding x-ray and picture were taken. To illustrate incorrect identification of the joint location, a needle was inserted at points one joint distal and one joint proximal to the sacro-coccygeal joint and reference photographs and corresponding x-rays were taken. The pictures and images of the x-ray films are in the slide presentation.

Process
The following are three methods to accomplish properly locating the dock point:
1. X-ray (not very practical)
2. The sacral vertebrae have a ridge or bump that the coccygeal vertebrae do not. A person can be trained to feel that ridge’s terminus and thus count the required three coccygeal vertebrae. (This process will take training and practice)
3. Since the coccygeal vertebrae are not fused together (sacral vertebrae are), a tail can wiggle. A person can feel where the tail begins to wiggle and count three “wiggling vertebrae”. (This is not as reliable and can lead to technician error)

The method providing the best balance of certainty and simplicity is the second. To ensure three coccygeal vertebrae are left after docking, a technician has to be able to locate where the sacral vertebrae end and the coccygeal vertebrae begin. Upon identifying this sacro-coccygeal joint, the technician then must be able to feel and count three vertebrae towards the distal end of the tail to locate the proper dock point.

Note: It was observed for the three lambs docked on the day that the pictures and x-rays used in this presentation were taken, the third joint in the coccygeal vertebrae happened to coincide with the “distal end of the caudal fold.” If that were to always be the case, the distal end of the caudal fold would be an easy reference point at which to dock. Producers familiar with the proper dock point in their stock will likely revert to locating this point as a reference to guide their three coccygeal vertebrae docking location.

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