**INTRAOPERATIVE CONSIDERATIONS FOR DISBUDDING CALVES**

Disbudding is performed by cautery. The instrument used needs to be hot, sharp and of the right size:

The tip of the instrument needs to be kept sharp and even. Prolonged use will erode the edge to a blunt and ragged shape. Tips can be filed back into shape a few times after which they need to be replaced. To prevent horn regrowth the quality of the instrument will determine the temperature at the tip; high wind speeds can cool it down. Some brands of instruments will not be able to generate sufficient heat to disbud many calves in fast succession; two cautery instruments may have to be used alternatively.

Animals often struggle violently and have to be restrained manually or in a head bail (a metal apparatus for restraining a cow by the neck) during the painful disbudding process, when done inhumanely without anesthetics or painkillers and results in severe pain that lasts for hours and can become chronic.

This procedure is extremely traumatic to young calves, who are often just a few weeks old when their horn buds are burned or cut out of their heads.

An important first step in disbudding is to have an appropriate and adequate method of restraining the calf. Proper restraint ensures the safety of both the calf and the operator.

Calves less than 1 month of age can be dehorned by laying them on their side and holding

them down. This may require an extra person and the ability to tie down a young calf.

A squeeze chute or headgate will be needed for older calves. A head bar and nose bar will

aid in restraining the animal’s head.



When done correctly, disbudding will both remove the horn and also prevent it from regrowing

during the life of the animal. The horn grows from the skin at the base of the horn. A properly

dehorned animal should have a 1/4 – 1/2 inch wide ring of skin at the base of the horn removed

Calves that have been injected with local anaesthetic should get another raddle mark to avoid duplicate injections. The recommended minimum amount of time between injecting the local anaesthetic and disbudding is 3 minutes. Any struggling by the calf during disbudding means that either not enough time was allowed between injection of local anaesthetic and disbudding,

and/ or improper placement of the local anaesthetic. Allow more time and/or inject more local anaesthetic if this problem occurs.