



Invert the harvested velvet at a slight angle (15-30 degrees) for best colour

The colour of your velvet

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With a good proportion of NZ velvet now being exported whole-stick it pays to make sure that your harvesting practices produce velvet of the best possible colour.

Previously, producers have not been too worried about good velvet colour, because there has been no premium for it.

The producer sells the frozen stick, and it is then up to the processor to dry it in a way which gives the best colour distribution.

Of course, the processor usually cannot see the success of his efforts, and it is only in the marketplace, when the velvet stick is sliced, that the true colour is seen for the first time. Good colour means the appropriate shade of brown or red for the specific part of the stick. Achieving this depends on both the actions of the producer and the ability of the processor. It can be influenced by the producer in a number of ways, depending on how much blood is in the velvet at the time of cutting and how the producer handles the velvet after cutting.

On the stag, blood is fairly evenly distributed throughout the antler. After removal, the stick is typically tipped upside down to stop blood spillage.

This is where the trouble starts. The blood begins to separate after removal and the heavier red cells tend to pool in the tip and upper regions, which of course are lowest in the inverted antler.

It is very difficult for the processor to redistribute these cells during drying, and sticks left upside down for too long take on a swollen appearance. This also makes

processing a challenge. Producers can avoid these problems by placing the antler on a slight angle (15-30 degrees), with the base elevated after removal, and then keeping it at this angle during freezing, if possible.

It is also a good idea to freeze velvet as soon as practicable after removal, as we have found a trend towards higher levels of bacterial contamination in sticks kept for as little as four hours before freezing.

It's probably best to velvet in a crush or a workroom using local analgesia only. At this stage we believe that the method of local administration (ring or site block) does not influence colour.

The method of restraint and analgesia also influence velvet colour. The use of sedative drugs such as xylazine and fentanyl is normally associated with poorer coloured velvet.

This may be simply because these drugs lower blood pressure so that there is less blood in the stick at removal time. Less blood will lead to less redness and hence poorer colour.

Sedatives also alter the distribution of colour in the stick. This may mean that fewer slices are of acceptable colour. There are also strong indications that even non-sedative doses of these drugs lower velvet colour.

Colour does not seem to be affected by the angle or position of the head, nor by the

amount of time spent in the yard. But we believe that stags should be velveted as soon as possible after entering the yards to lower stress and minimise the risk of damage.

The timing of tourniquet application in relation to cutting is variable in its effects on colour. If local analgesia only is used, it makes no real difference if the tourniquet is applied at the time of the local injection or immediately before velvet removal.

In contrast, if heavy sedation is used, the tourniquet should be put on as soon as possible to produce the best colour. The rest of the procedure is up to the processor, but if velvet is removed according to the above guidelines, this will produce the best colour, certainly for a sliced market.

Because velvet product requirements may become more specific as new markets are gained, there may be additional requirements for colour type and distribution. The GIB has invested in research at AgResearch Invermay which has produced a substantial amount of data which can be applied to these novel requirements.

For now, the best advice is:

- Lay off sedative drugs such as xylazine (Rompun), carfentanil and fentanyl
- Don't fully invert the velvet after removal
- Freeze as quickly as possible
- Keep your yards and velvet handling area clean — it is food you are handling! ■

