A teaser (gomer) is a sterilized male used to detect estrus in females. Teaser animals can be useful in cattle and small ruminant populations. Their principle use is to identify females for artificial insemination. Other potential benefits of using teaser animals include hastening the onset of cycling in young animals and causing animals to begin cycling earlier following parturition. Teaser rams are used to encourage ewes to start breeding earlier during the breeding season and for shortening the lambing period.

Goals for the creation of teaser animals include the prevention of fertilization and prevention of the spread of venereal diseases (mainly Tritrichomonas fetus in cattle). The maintenance of libido is another goal. Prevention of fertilization is accomplished by sterilizing the animal in one of two methods, vasectomy or epididymectomy. To minimize the spread of venereal diseases, either a penopexy (prevents penile exteriorization) or translocation of the prepuce and penis (re-directs the penis) can be performed (more common in cattle than small ruminants).

Choice and Identification of Animal

Choosing the correct animal to make a teaser is the first important step. A good candidate should have a mild temperament and good libido. When choosing a bull, it is important that he is of moderate to small adult size so that he can be used on heifers without causing a problem, however this is seldom an issue with small ruminants. Ideally the surgery is performed while he is younger and of smaller adult size to facilitate restraint and the surgical procedure. An animal that is destined to be culled from the herd or flock because of low genetic potential makes an ideal candidate (hence this can be a lifesaving procedure). However, he should be free of disease, he should be sound (remember he will have to chase females), and should have good eyesight (he should be able to see the females). Perhaps most importantly, he should be free of contagious disease, especially venereal disease.

Before commencing on the surgical procedure to create a teaser animal, it is also vitally important that we verify that the animal that we are about to operate is the correct animal. Remember that these procedures are not (at least easily) reversible and it is often not obvious which animal is intended to be sterilized.

Since it is often not apparently obvious that an animal has been sterilized, some producers desire to mark the animal with an obvious identification which lets them know that the animal is a teaser. Ear notching, ear tipping, and ear tagging with a highly identifiable ear tag are practices that can be employed to identify the animal as a gomer.
Anesthesia and Restraint

In cattle, the procedure is mostly safely performed with the animal in lateral recumbency restrained on a hoof trimming table or casted with ropes under heavy sedation. In small ruminants, the procedure can be safely performed with manual restraint with the animal casted on his rump (sitting position).

An assistant can sit in a chair during the procedure and hold the animal between their legs rather comfortably. The vasectomy or epididymectomy can be performed easily while the animal is in this position. Since the smell of bucks can be offensive, I often offer my assistant to wear a disposal impervious gown and gloves while they are holding the patient.

Sedation can be useful to facilitate restraint and make the surgical procedure more controlled. Local anesthesia is infused locally over the surgical sites. 2% lidocaine is mostly commonly used. Although, it is not usually a problem in adult animals, the veterinarian should remember that small ruminants have a more narrow therapeutic window of lidocaine compared to cattle. Care should be taken to not exceed 4-5 mg/kg of lidocaine in small ruminants (around 1 ml/ 10 lbs of body weight of 2% lidocaine). Consider withholding feed 12 hours prior to the procedure to decrease the chance of bloat or regurgitation during the procedure.

Sedation increases the safety of the procedure, and makes performance of the procedure easier. Many appropriate sedation protocols have been described. The author prefers xylazine @ a dose of 0.05 mg/kg IV. Another useful sedation protocol for minor procedures is 0.01 mg/kg butorphanol, 0.02 mg/kg Xylazine, and 0.04 mg/kg ketamine given together IM.

Surgical techniques

The most common surgical techniques employed to create teaser animals in sheep and goats are vasectomy and epididymectomy. Both of these techniques interfere with the passage of spermatozoa from the testes to the penile urethra and render the animal infertile. Neither of these procedures stop the production or ejaculation of semen. Both of these procedures allow for intromission therefore the spread of venereal disease is possible. Other techniques, less commonly performed in small ruminants (more common in cattle) include penopexy, penectomy, or preputial translocation. These procedures alter the ability of the penis to penetrate the vulvar lips and will prevent intromission which will limit the spread of potential venereal disease within a herd or flock. Since Tritrichomonas fetus is more prevalent in beef cattle herds these techniques are more commonly performed in cattle. Also the small penis size of sheep and goats make these techniques more challenging to perform in small ruminants.

Vasectomy

Vasectomy is the mainstay therapy for rendering a buck or ram infertile. The procedure is performed under Xylazine sedation, (0.05 mg/kg) and the buck is cast and placed into a sitting position.
Lidocaine is infused in the skin and subcutaneous tissues on the cranial aspect at the base of the scrotum.

The surgical incision is made directly over the spermatic cord at the cranial base of the scrotum on the cranial aspect. The spermatic cord is exposed as the fascial attachments of the cord to the scrotum are broken down. Following exposure of the spermatic cord, the deferent duct is identified by palpation. The duct will feel more firm than any other structure within the cord. Locating the duct can be the most challenging part of the procedure as it is often obscured by surrounding cord tissue. Subcutaneous fat may have to be cleared to expose the spermatic cord. A 2-3 cm section of the duct is separated from the remainder of the cord. It is ligated and transected at both ends. The skin is closed routinely. A one layer closure is sufficient. If the spermatic cord is prolapsed through the opening created in the vaginal tunic and subcutaneous tissues, it is replaced but the tunic is not closed. The author routinely lavages the tissues with procaine penicillin G (PPG) prior to skin closure. Meat residues are possible. A vasectomy is performed on the opposite side in an identical manner. The author does not perform both vasectomies from a common incision. Doing so makes exteriorization of the contralateral spermatic cord difficult. The excised portions of the vas deferens can be kept for histopathologic analysis if question ever arises that the animal is fertile. Infertility is not immediate as there may be viable sperm in the duct distal to the vasectomy site. Allowing 60 days is recommended to clear out this sperm before using.

**Epididymectomy**

An epididymectomy is an alternative procedure for rendering an animal infertile. This procedure involves excision of the tail of the epididymis. Epididymectomy is easier to perform than vasectomy because the epididymis is large and palpable through the skin. It is located at the most ventral portion of the scrotum and can be accessed prior to incising.

Restraint and anesthesia for the epididymectomy is identical to that for the vasectomy except for the location of the local block. Lidocaine is infused over the right and left epididymis. Incisions are made on the ventral scrotum directly over the tail of the epididymis. Firm ventral pressure applied to the testicles cause the tail of the epididymis to be tight against the scrotal skin and facilitate skin incision. The incision is made in a cranial to caudal direction. Ventral pressure should be maintained and the incision is enlarged until the epididymis prolapses through the skin incision. The tail of the epididymis is separated from the ventral testicle. Proximal and distal ligatures are placed, and the tail of the epididymis is ligated and excised. As for the vasectomy, it is recommended to wait 60 days before using the animal for teasing to allow the distal duct to clear any viable sperm.
Penopexy and Penile-Preputial Translocation

These procedures are routinely performed in cattle but not commonly in small ruminants at the author’s practice. The penopexy or “penile-tie-down” is a procedure aimed at preventing penile exteriorization by establishing a firm adhesion between the penis and ventral body wall. Complications of the penopexy include infection or dehiscence of the surgical site and frustration experience by the patient as the animal cannot exteriorize his penis.

Another method of preventing intromission is relocating the preputial orifice laterally so that the extended penis misses the vaginal opening.

Special difference for small ruminants

Six to eight weeks of sexual rest is recommended to ensure all viable sperm distal to vasectomy site is cleared from the urogenital tract. Using the teaser to “breed” animals that are non-valuable or animal which doesn’t matter if they get bred by the teaser will hasten the clearance of any viable sperm within the urogenital track. A semen check to ensure infertility is recommended prior to use.

Non-surgical methods:

In goats, intersex animals have been used successfully to identify cycling animals. A teaser can also be created hormonally. A wether, doe or ewe that is not actively being used for breeding can be used as a teaser by the administration of testosterone propionate. The dose is 100 mg testosterone propionate every third day. Alternatively 150 mg may be administered weekly. Testosterone administration should begin 3 weeks before the teaser is used and administration should continue through the breeding season.

Intact males that have suffered from urolithiasis and have experienced urethral damage or have undergone a perineal urethrostomy will not be able to effectively breed females and can be effective teaser animals. Likewise animals that have experienced penile trauma and adhesions of the penis to the surrounding tissues (more common in cattle) can also be effective teaser animals.