

Extension Cattle Call

Stanly County Livestock Market- Norwood

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IDENTIFYING YOUR CATTLE

Morgan Watts, Livestock Agent, Rowan County

There are many identification options that you can use for your herd. What you use depends on your preference and needs. Some of these options are considered temporary, while others are considered permanent.

The most common identification method used is ear tags. Ear tagging is the easiest option and can be customized to fit your operation. They can be purchased in a variety of colors. You can even have them customized with your farm name. They can be purchased with numbers already printed on them or you can get blank tags to write any information you may need. Ear tags are considered a temporary form of identification, as they do occasionally get ripped or torn out. If you are using blank tags and writing on them, marking ink can fade over time. The other issue with ear tags is that they are harder to see from a distance. I recommend pairing ear tags with a form of permanent identification.

Freeze branding is another option for identification. This is considered a permanent form of identification that can be seen from a greater distance. Freeze branding is the use of branding irons (letters and number) being chilled in dry ice or liquid nitrogen and alcohol. This process kills the color producing cells but doesn't kill the follicles that produce hair growth. What you end up with is white or colorless follicles where the brand was placed that you can see all year round. The cons of freeze branding are that it does require more equipment, time, and upfront cost. The success is not always 100% and that can depend on the age of animal, hair color, method, and where you place the brand.

You can also do hot iron branding. Hot iron branding is more commonly used for ownership purposes, but it can also be used for individual identification. This is a permanent form of identification that is easy to read from a distance. The negatives are like with freeze branding in the extra upfront costs and time to get your calves branded.

Tattooing is also a form that is used for identification; it is permanent. Tattooing is more commonly used in the purebred cattle industry. The initial cost to tattoo is not too expensive, and you can use numbers and letters. A con is that you have to have the animal restrained to read the tattoo. Even then, depending on the color of the calf, you may need a flashlight to see it. Tattoos are placed in the ear of the animal. It is recommended that you pair this with another form of identification that is more easily seen from a distance.

The use of identification systems is necessary for proper data collection and to help maximize management practices. Sometimes, the use of two identification tools is necessary to get maximum accuracy. Determine what you need out of your operations identification system before choosing the best method for you.

Cattle Rustling....What Cattle Producers Need to Know!

John Cothren, Livestock Agent, Wilkes County

Cattle theft may not be something you hear about all the time but it still happens from time to time. Cattle producers need to be aware of the possibilities and be prepared to prevent this from happening to them. Security for livestock is difficult. Fences are designed to keep cattle in – not to keep thieves out. Isolated herds can't be watched 24 hours a day, and livestock can be difficult to positively identify. This all adds up to providing thieves with an accessible target without too much risk. It would seem today's cattle rustlers aren't your normal thieves. They need a truck and trailer and some knowledge of handling and selling cattle-so as not to arouse suspicion. They are looking for easy targets-easy to steal and easy to dispose of. What can you do to make their "job" more difficult?

The first step is to regularly check your cattle and the pastures and fences where the cattle are, daily if possible – especially around sale days - to ensure that suspected losses are found and reported to police as soon as possible. Make sure you keep all pasture and working facility gates closed and locked. Monitor your locks; in one recent occurrence the thieves changed the lock on a gate so they could come back later. Keep your fences and gates in good repair. Gate hinges should have capped hinges so they cannot be removed easily. Go around your property and look at it through the eyes of a thief. Look for areas where thieves could easily operate. This particularly applies to facilities that border a road.

Another important item is to be visible on your property. Leave tire tracks and evidence that you are frequently checking your paddocks. You may also want to stop by your farm at different times of the day. Thieves could be watching your place and taking notes of when you are there every day so they can come back when they have the maximum amount of time available. You should always be aware of strangers or unfamiliar vehicles in your area. Write down their license plate numbers and all other relevant information. Also alert your neighbors about strange vehicles in your area. If you have two or more accesses to your property, ask neighbors that live close to a gate to watch for strange vehicles. Let them know they should contact you if they see anyone on the property. Many times, thieves will work during daytime hours, and it looks like someone is just there loading cattle for the sale the next day. If you trust your neighbors, tell them when you are away from your property and where you can be contacted and suggest they do the same. If you can, locate handling facilities away from public roads or main entrances to your property. Keep them locked when not in use. Don't leave cattle in those facilities especially if they are not in sight of your house.

Livestock identification is absolutely essential for proof of ownership and ultimately the return of stolen stock and the eventual conviction of offenders. There can be several witnesses to a stock theft but without proof of ownership, the thief may never be prosecuted. Livestock identification can be ear tags, earmarks, tattooing or branding. Tattooing is a cheap form of permanent identification and is seldom altered by thieves because they don't even know it is there. Tattooing is generally done in one or both ears. Freeze branding, hot iron branding or electrical branding is the most visible marking system. Take photographs or videos of valuable animals with the brand and/or ear tags clearly visible. It is also a good idea to have some identifying aspect of your property in the background, such as your house or sheds.

It is important to maintain good records. Keep accurate records of all animals bought and sold from your property. Record all births and deaths of livestock on your property. Record all details of stock with identification numbers. Also an active membership with the North Carolina Cattlemen's Association provides livestock producers access to a \$1,000 cattle theft award program.

So what do you do if you're a victim of cattle theft? If cattle are stolen, it is important that you report the crime to police as soon as possible. Law enforcement officers insist that even if some time has passed since the event, and regardless of the number of stock missing, they still need to hear about it. There may be a pattern of crimes in the area; and with more information, they can begin to target the thief. Do not disturb anything in or around the area involved until the officers arrive. Do not allow people or animals in or around the area or in areas where entry was possibly made. You will need to provide an accurate description of your stock including: the breed, age and sex of the animals, the type of identification used and the identification numbers if available, where the stock were located, when you last checked the stock, and any other relevant information.

It is impossible to completely eliminate cattle thefts but every producer should do what they can to prevent them. The harder it is for thieves the first time, the less likely they will be back for more cattle.