

Methods of Animal Identification

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Beef cattle producers need some method to identify the animals in their herd. Without some type of identification, it is difficult if not impossible to maintain performance records that are needed for selection of replacements and the culling of low producing animals.

Several methods can be used to identify beef animals. Following is a short discussion of several methods of animal identification.

Tattoo: The ear tattoo is a permanent method of identification that is required by most breed associations for registration. The tattoo is relatively easy to apply, even by the inexperienced producer. The big disadvantage of the tattoo is that the animal must be restrained for the number to be read.

Neck Chains or Ropes: Neck Chains or ropes are attached around the animal's neck. This method is relatively permanent, however the rope or chain can get caught in fences, feeders or other devices and be pulled off. This method of identification does offer the capability of being read without restraining the animal. Neck Chains or ropes are quickly being abandoned in favor of other methods of identification.

Ear Tags: Ear tags are the most widely used method of identification of beef cattle. The tags are attached in the ear. Tags are generally large enough to make reading relatively easy to read while animals are out in the pasture. A disadvantage is that some tags are lost due to the tag getting caught in feeders or other devices. Electronic ear tags are also being used to identify animals. These tags emit a signal that can be read by a special reader. The problem is that the numbers are too small to be visually read without restraining the animal. Most readers must be held within eighteen inches of the tag to be electronically read. Electronic tag manufacturers are now selling a "nested" tag that has an electronic tag and a regular tag with the Electronic tag number imprinted on it.

Branding: Branding is one of the oldest methods of animal identification. The “hot” brand has been used in the West for establishing ownership for a long time. Branding is one of the most permanent method of animal identification. Freeze brands instead of hot brand are used more widely in the Southern part of the United States. The freeze brand destroys the pigment producing cells in the hair to cause the hair to be white when it grows out. Keeping the freezing branding in contact with the hide for a longer time will result destruction of the hair with a resulting bald brand. The disadvantage of a brand is the damage that is done to the hide. If branding is used, it is recommended that the brand not be placed on the side of the animal. The brand should be placed so cutting out of the damaged hide will result in minimal loss.

Identification of animals is necessary for establishment of ownership and for management. Producers should select the method that best fits their operation. For additional information on animal identification, contact the local Extension office.