

Chapter 10

Cattle Identification

Animal identification is important in cattle herds for effective record keeping, performance testing, and artificial insemination, as well as routine observations. The three most common methods of identification are ear-tagging, tattooing, and branding.

A unique numbering system should be used so that your records are meaningful. Each animal should have a unique number. Herd size determines how many digits are necessary, but each digit should have some meaning.

Use of emerging cattle identification technology, such as electronic ear tags, is encouraged when practical. The cost is declining for electronic identification, also known as radio frequency identification. As speed, performance, and cost improve, more segments of the industry will use this technology for birth-to-slaughter animal identification. Full traceability back through all production segments is the ultimate goal.

Beyond the food safety and animal health goals of the National Animal Identification System, the driving force for electronic tracking comes down to economics. By “connecting the dots” through the entire beef chain, producers benefit from valuable data that allows them to make informed decisions, improve management, and take advantage of emerging profit opportunities. Tracking cattle is not just a matter of putting an ear tag in a calf. Electronic identification tags cannot do it all. Cooperation is needed among all segments of beef and dairy production, including those involved in the buying, marketing, and processing of cattle. More information on animal identification can be found at <http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/index.shtml>.

Hot or freeze branding is necessary under some management conditions. Hot branding in some states is the only legal proof of ownership. If cattle are branded, it should be accomplished correctly and with the proper equipment. When brands are used, place them high on the hip and use the smallest symbol possible to minimize or hide damage.

Premise Identification

Many issues and concerns surround voluntary and mandatory identification programs. While these issues are being resolved, states are issuing premise ID numbers and developing satellite mapping to prepare emergency response plans in the event of a disease outbreak or chemical exposure. As stated in the strategic plan by the USDA, “The goal of the NAIS is to be able to identify all animals and premises that have had contact with a foreign or domestic animal disease of concern (i.e., foot-and-mouth or BSE) within 48 hours after discovery.” In addition to safeguarding food safety and animal health, the goals of the NAIS plan protect beef and dairy producers by limiting the potential for devastating economic losses in the event of a disease outbreak. For more information about premise and animal ID, contact your State Department of Agriculture (<http://state.us/agriculture/tpis>).



Sample numbering system:

Ear tag 7214 could refer to:

7: 2007 birth year

2: sire No. 2

14: 14th calf born in 2007

