

Cattle Rustling Thriving In Southwest In Bad Economy

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Hard economic times have led to a drastic increase in cattle rustling across Texas and Oklahoma, and Arkansas could be next, warns Dr. Tom Troxel, extension professor of animal science for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

More than twice as many head of cattle were stolen in Oklahoma and Texas last year as the year before, according to a trade organization. Law enforcers in South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana are also reporting cattle thefts. In Missouri, a recent rash of rustling, especially in the southwestern corner of the state has prompted the Missouri Farm Bureau to offer \$5,000 in rewards to catch the thieves. According to the Missouri Cattlemen's Association, since 2004, more than 3,200 head of cattle have been stolen, along with some trailers, trucks and four-wheelers.

could help law enforcement officers find your cattle if they're taken.

Troxel also gives these tips to protect your herd from theft:

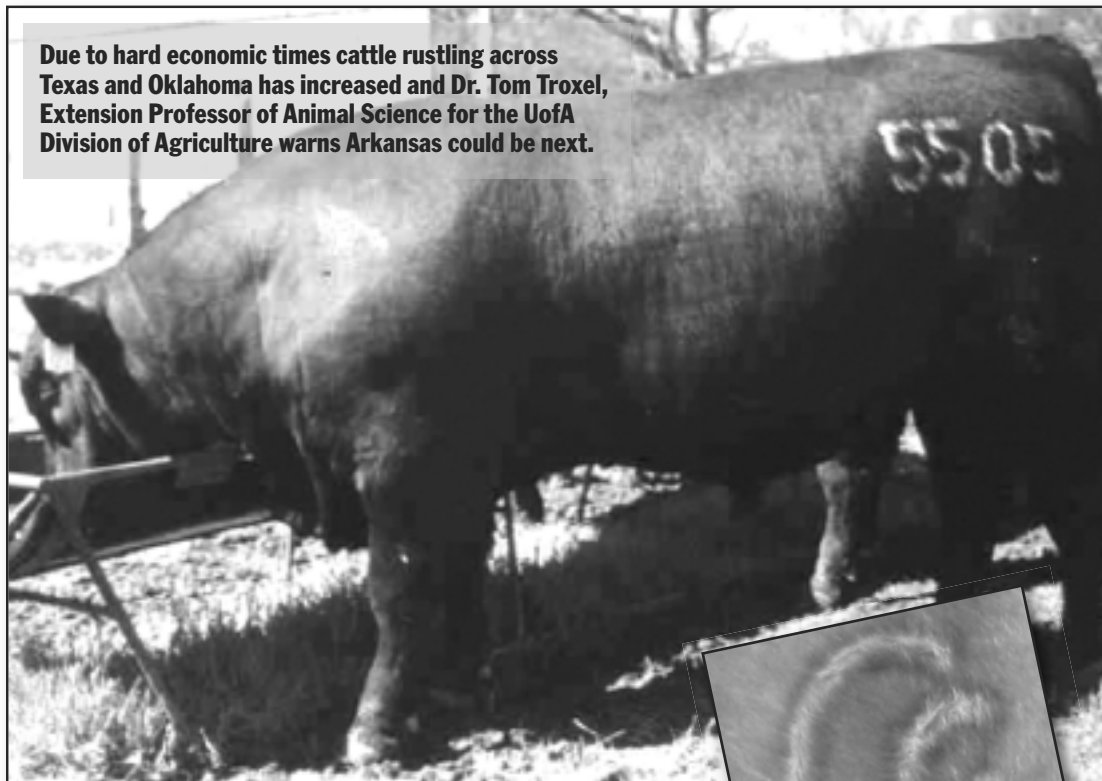
- Visit your cattle every day and count heads. The earlier you know they're missing, the better chance authorities will have of finding them.

- Take time to inspect the outside fence. Look for spots that were cut and haphazardly repaired. Look around for tire tracks, footprints, horse prints, etc., and if you find anything suspicious, preserve the evidence for authorities.

- Report suspicious vehicles. If you see an unfamiliar truck being driven slowly, someone may be scouting your pasture. Report the incident to local law enforcement. Contact neighbors and let them know about the incident.

It's important to know local law enforcement officers and their telephone numbers.

Due to hard economic times cattle rustling across Texas and Oklahoma has increased and Dr. Tom Troxel, Extension Professor of Animal Science for the UofA Division of Agriculture warns Arkansas could be next.



"You may have thought cattle rustling was a thing of the past, a common theme in old western movies," says Troxel. "But nothing could be further from the truth."

Many rural areas are experiencing increased unemployment rate. "Oftentimes, desperate people do desperate things," he said.

Travis Justice, a spokesman for Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation, said cattle rustling isn't a problem in Arkansas yet. "It happens here and there, but I haven't heard of anything in a while."

Rustlers can strike overnight by gathering a group of cattle, loading them into a trailers or trucks and hauling them away to a livestock sale – all without being noticed, according to Troxel. Typically, the owner visits the herd the next morning and finds an empty pasture.

What can a beef cattle producer do to protect his livestock?

"As old-fashioned and outdated a practice as it seems, branding is still one of the best ways to protect your animals," Troxel says. "Even with all the technology today, branding is the best way to permanently identify cattle."

It's also important to register the brand with the Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Commission, he says. Having your brand registered,

If possible, keep calves away from easy road access. An all-weather road can be a friend to a cattle rustler. Cattle rustlers can't afford to get stuck in mud or waste time.

Troxel says cattle, unlike most other stolen property, can be sold for full value at weekly livestock auctions.

"Often, a sale barn owner may recognize cattle brought to their barn as belonging to somebody else," Troxel says. "But the victim of cattle rustling can't always rely on the owner to report a heist. The rustler may take the stolen cattle to a livestock auction in another location or state."

Livestock theft of more than \$200 is a Class C felony punishable by a fine of up to \$10,000 and a prison term from three to 10 years, according to Troxel.

"Cattle rustling is a modern day crime," he says. "Cattle producers must stay on their guard to prevent thefts." Δ

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