

Done Correctly, Registered Brands Can Reduce Cattle Theft And Provide A Trademark

MT. VERNON, MO.

Branding cattle is a long-standing tradition in many states, a legal requirement in some others.

Missouri, however, does not require cattle and horses to be branded.

"Missouri does have a law (passed in 1971) that allows registering brands in the state," said Eldon Cole, livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

Initially, only hot iron brands were considered legal, but in 1992 freeze branding was recognized as an acceptable ownership brand in Missouri.

Currently about 4,800 brands are registered and in the state brand book.

"The 4,800 brands represent a very small portion of the cattle and horse owners of the state," said Cole. "The estimated number of cattle farms is between 55,000 and 60,000."

WHY BRAND?

Cattle owners brand for different reasons. For some, it's a tradition that dates back several generations. But branding is also a deterrent to theft.

"It may not prevent it, but a smart, observant thief will think twice before stealing legibly branded cattle," said Cole.

Livestock auctions can easily identify branded cattle and the workers may even recognize those selling branded cattle as non-owners.

"Law enforcement personnel appreciate well-defined brands as they search for stolen cattle. To them, a black, 600 pound steer without a permanent identification mark is hard to identify for ownership," said Cole.

Branding can also be used as a sort of trademark. Cole says this is especially true for seedstock producers because they benefit from having their brand displayed on the animal in a show, sale, website or when he serves as a herd sire in a prominent herd or bull stud.

"A nice brand can serve to prevent ownership

disputes in case your cattle find their way into a neighbor's pasture," said Cole.

CONSIDER OPTIONS

Arguments against branding livestock surface from time-to-time. The usual complaint is that a brand reduces the hide value. However, Cole says this tends to be more a concern on rib-branded cattle than with hip or shoulder brands.

There is also the question of pain during the branding and the time and skill necessary to produce a legible brand.

"Each cattle owner must weigh the pros and cons of branding," said Cole.

Should a cattle producer choose to brand, the brand must be registered with the Missouri Department of Agriculture. The initial charge is \$35. To maintain the brand on the books, \$20 must be paid every 5 years.

"The same identical brand can be registered with the six different firms so long as the brand is placed in a different location," said Cole.

The acceptable locations for brands are the shoulder, rib and hip on each side of the animal.

"The hip is the preferred location to minimize damage to a valuable portion of the hide. It also is a handy location in most squeeze chutes," said Cole.

Persons wanting to register a brand should check the 2010 Missouri Brand Book to see if their choice of a brand has been assigned previously. Brand books are available in most University of Missouri Extension centers, county recorder of deeds offices and from the county sheriff.

Plans are to place the brand book online in the near future.

For more information, contact either of the MU Extension livestock specialists in southwest Missouri: Eldon Cole in Mt. Vernon, (417) 466-3102 or Dona Goede in Cedar County, (417) 276-3313.

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