



# CATTLE IDENTIFICATION AND PROTECTION

**MELVIN A. KIRKEIDE**  
Extension Animal Husbandman

To the city dweller, cattle branding may be thought of as a part of the folklore of the old West. In reality, there is a greater need for cattle identification and protection today than ever. With increased cattle values, there is usually an increase in cattle theft, and modern transportation makes it possible to move stolen cattle far from their local areas very rapidly. The failure of cattlemen to use permanent cattle identification, such as hot iron brands, makes proof of ownership difficult.

Good hot brands and ear tattoos are the most satisfactory means of permanent identification. Other semi-permanent means such as ear tags are widely used and useful for many purposes. In addition to protection from theft, performance testing makes individual cattle identification necessary.

## BRANDING

Branding consists of putting an owner's mark or brand on the hide of an animal. Branding is usually done with a hot iron, although it is sometimes done with an electric iron. Freeze branding has been done for individual identification, but it is not recommended for recorded brands.

Branding is done primarily for proof of ownership. The cowman depends on his brand or mark to identify his livestock on the range, at the market, in the feedlot or wherever cattle are found.

A good brand is an infallible proof of ownership. Every day, brands are responsible for restoring strayed or stolen cattle to the rightful owner.

S  
544.3  
N9  
A8

no. 579

**COOPERATIVE  
EXTENSION  
SERVICE** 

North Dakota State University Fargo, North Dakota 58105

## BRAND INSPECTION

Responsibility for livestock brand inspection in North Dakota is delegated by the Legislature to the North Dakota Stockmen's Association under the supervision of the North Dakota Livestock Sanitary Board.

In turn, the Stockmen's Association employs a chief brand inspector who is charged with providing inspection at all public livestock markets and for local or country sales of livestock. Violations are prevented and prosecuted through cooperation with local sheriffs, the Highway Patrol, Truck Regulatory Division, Packers and Stockyards Division of USDA and liaison with officials in other states.

## BRAND REGISTRATION

Applications for brands are made with the Commissioner of Agriculture, Brand Recording Department, Bismarck. The recording fee is \$5. A brand book showing all brands and brand owners in North Dakota is available for \$5.

To register a brand, write to the North Dakota Department of Agriculture, Brand Division, State Capitol, Bismarck, N. D. 58501 for a brand application form.

According to the North Dakota State Brand Law, single character brands cannot be registered. To issue a single letter or number brand in one position prevents registration of many other suitable brands containing that letter or number in that position.

Special appreciation for assistance with this publication is expressed to the North Dakota Stockmen's Association and the North Dakota Department of Agriculture, Brand Division.

The same set of characters constitute a different brand when placed on a different location.

The practice of using non-registered brands is definitely discouraged. Brand inspectors cannot establish ownership of animals bearing a brand that is not registered.

Brands in the shape of animal or bird heads, etc., are not issued. These types do not lend themselves to ready interpretation when brands are being cleared by inspectors.

The choice of brands must consist of two letters, figures or a combination of letter, figure, or other characters.

The brand of your choice may not be available for registration because of similarity to another registered brand in the same location. Several choices of brands and positions should be shown on the application in the order preferred.

The state of North Dakota does not have a compulsory branding law. However, branding is recommended as a safeguard to positive identification.

Select a brand that is distinctive and easily recognized. Record a brand that is simple and easy to apply.

## ESTRAY CATTLE

If an estray cattle is on your premises and the ownership is unknown, first make every reasonable attempt to determine the rightful owner.

If the owner cannot be located, there are two courses of action. One is to inform the county sheriff so he may advertise for the rightful owner. The other is to deliver stray cattle to a public livestock market licensed under the laws of the state and inform the brand inspector that the animal is being delivered as an stray. Proceeds of the sale will then be held by the North Dakota Stockmen's Association for the rightful owner.

If cattle are lost or stolen, you should inform your local neighborhood by telephone, bulletin board and announcements at public meetings.

Put an ad in the local newspaper describing the lost animals, including such distinguishing marks as brand, ear notch, breed, color, size, age and sex. Inform radio stations that broadcast public service announcements (local newspapers might provide the same service).

Notify your local brand inspector and the county sheriff.

If your community is aware of cattle losses, there is a better chance to retrieve the lost cattle and stop future losses. Record the license numbers of strange cars, pickups and trucks traveling roads in

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

## APPLICATION FOR BRAND

On this 1 day of July, 1920, I John Doe We (Please Print)  
Raytown North Dakota 5000 County of Miner  
(Address) (Zip Code)

hereby place application for recording of the following livestock brand:

<p>Exact Drawing of Brand</p> <div style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">-N</div>	<p>Position Where Used on Animal</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">HORSES:</td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">RH</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CATTLE:</td> <td style="text-align: center;">LR</td> </tr> <tr> <td>MULES:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>SHEEP:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>SWINE:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	HORSES:	RH	CATTLE:	LR	MULES:		SHEEP:		SWINE:	
HORSES:	RH										
CATTLE:	LR										
MULES:											
SHEEP:											
SWINE:											

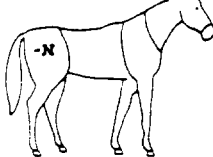
APPLICANTS SIGN HERE

---

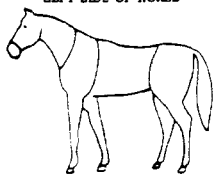
APPLICANTS SIGN HERE

---

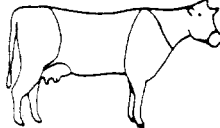
RIGHT SIDE OF HORSE



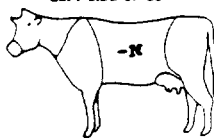
LEFT SIDE OF HORSE



RIGHT SIDE OF COW



LEFT SIDE OF COW



PLEASE NOTE: Applicant for brand will please place the exact pattern of the brand on the exact position on the animal where the brand is to be used.

SECOND CHOICE

-N

THIRD CHOICE

-Z

OFFICE USE

Do not brand livestock  
before receiving certificate

Standard size irons for branding letters and figures are 4-inch figures with a 3/8 to 1/2 inch face. Handles should be at least 36 inches long to permit ease of handling.

Materials for branding irons are iron, steel, stainless steel and copper. Iron is perhaps the most satisfactory. Stainless steel can withstand extreme heat without burning up while copper cannot, so copper is not as durable unless handled carefully. On the other hand, most commercial branding irons are made from copper alloy. These have the advantage of heating quickly and distributing the heat evenly for a long period of time.

Electric branding irons have the advantage of ease of heating and handling. However, electric current is needed at the branding site. Keep the face of the electric iron clean and protect it from cold wind, especially between brand applications.

Freeze branding is a technique in which a super cold branding iron applied to the animal's hide kills the pigment-producing cells. The result is that white hair instead of colored hair grows in the brand site. Freeze branding is not recommended for use as a permanent registered brand, but it is used for individual identification, such as for performance testing programs.

Calves on the range are usually branded in the spring. Early branding lessens the possibility of losses due to estrays or theft. Calves under closer surveillance are usually identified by eartags or ear notches when they are born. If heifers are to be sold as replacements, especially in the local community, they are usually left unbranded until after the sale so the new owner can apply his own brand. Some ranchers brand calves in the fall while others brand the following spring before turning cattle to pasture.

### TIPS ON BRANDING

- The animal must be restrained so it can't move. For calves, use a branding table, a suitable squeeze chute or rope and throw. For older animals, use a cattle squeeze chute with enough opening in the area where the brand is applied to avoid crowding of irons.

- Animals must be dry when branded. Branding wet animals causes steam scald, unnecessary burning and brand blotching.

- Clipping the brand area when animals have a heavy coat of hair may not be necessary but does improve uniformity of brands.

- Do not brand over any part of a previous brand.

- Apply irons at the right heat. You may have to experiment a bit to find the right heat. Start by applying the iron when it is the color of wood ashes. If too hot, the iron will start a hair fire. If too cold, it won't burn a permanent brand.

- There should be one application of the iron only. If it is necessary to retouch, do so with extreme care to avoid blotching.

- A proper brand should be the color of saddle leather when the iron is removed. Rocking the iron should assure that this is uniform on all lines of the scar.

- Depending on age, hair cover, etc., a rough guide to time of application of an iron of the right heat is three to five seconds.

- Other factors being equal, a copper iron will require slightly less time than a mild steel iron.

- Keep the irons free of scale, burnt hair, etc. A wire brush is ideal for this purpose. Keep branding irons free from rust and out of the weather when not in use.

- A wood fire is best for heating branding irons. Place the irons back in the fire after each application to regain proper heat. Gas heaters for branding irons can be purchased. They provide a constant heat which can be adjusted to the desired temperature.

- Burning deeper than the outer layer of skin will result in blotched sores that take far too long to heal and result in bad brands. Remember, you are only trying to burn the outer layer of the skin and should burn no deeper.

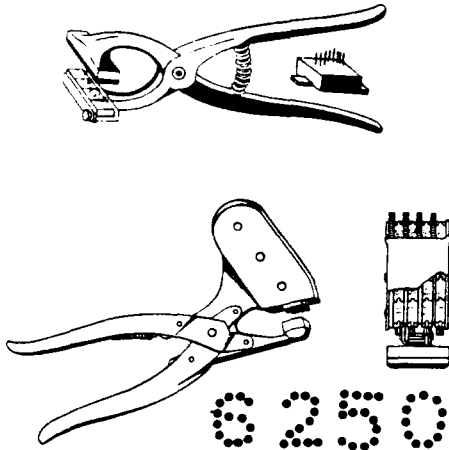


A steel oil barrel with openings cut at the top and side makes a good heating device for irons. Turn the barrel to increase or decrease the draft.

## TATOOING

Tattooing the ears is a method of marking cattle especially adapted for use in purebred herds. It is considered a permanent method of identification.

Tattooing is done with a special instrument that places characters, letters or numerals in and under the skin of the ear by means of a series of needlelike points.



Two types of tattooing instruments. Above, a simple type with interchangeable numbers and letters. Below, a rotary type suitable for large herds and for situations where speed is important.

Apply tattooing ink or paste with a toothbrush after the perforations have been made.

Tattooing instruments are obtainable from most dealers who handle stockman's supplies.

## EARMARKING

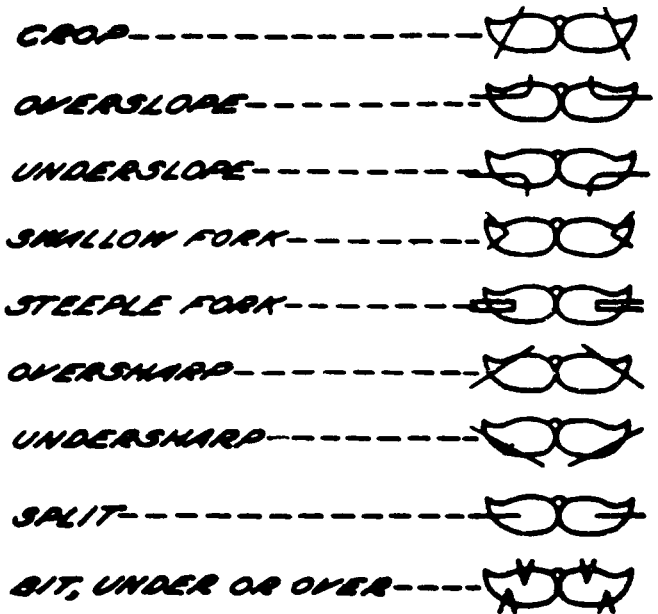
Ear notching is an effective way to determine ownership of cattle in the local community. It is especially helpful when calves crawl through fences between pastures or when the hair conceals the hot iron brand on older cattle. The simplest method is to ear notch with a special plier.



Three positions, top, bottom, and tip of each ear makes six locations available for community identification.

The practice of marking cattle by cutting ears is almost as widespread as branding and is usually done at the same time.

Some common earmarks----



**Crop**—Fold the ear lengthwise and make the cut at right angles to the folded edge.

**Overslope**—Make an incision a fraction of an inch from the point, toward the head, where the upper surface of the ear turns up. Cut down in a rounding manner approximately parallel to a line that would halve the ear lengthwise. A little upward slope given to the last cut gives a graceful curve.

**Underslope**—The underslope cut is on the underpart of the ear, and the first cut is made in an upward manner. The second is practically the same as in an overslope.

**Swallow fork**—Fold the ear lengthwise. From a point  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 inch from the tip, depending on the size of the ear, cut toward the outer sections in such a manner that a triangular section with a  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch base will be removed.

**Steeple fork**—Fold the ear lengthwise. Make the first cut at right angles to the seam, and the second parallel to the seam. Remove a rectangular section of the ear.

**Oversharp**—The cut is started at the same point as for an overslope, but brought downward and in a straight line to the median line at the tip of the ear.

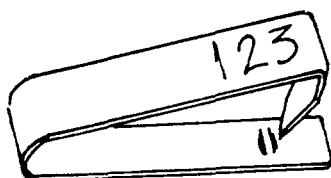
**Undersharp**—Cut in a straight line between the same points as in an oversharp.

**Split**—The knife blade is inserted and drawn to the outer edge of the ear.

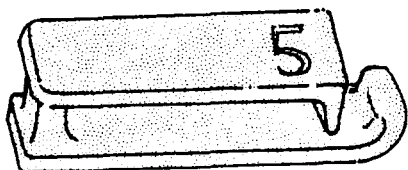
**Bit, over and under**—Fold the ear crosswise at the point where the bit is to be made. Remove a triangular section, as in making a swallow fork.



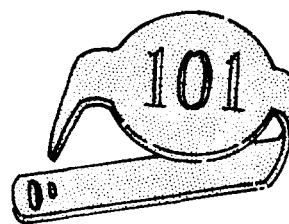
The simplest method of ear notching is with a special plier.



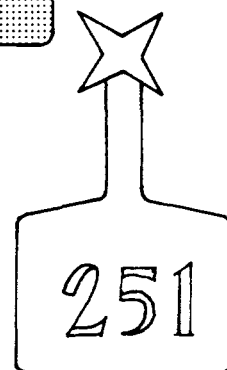
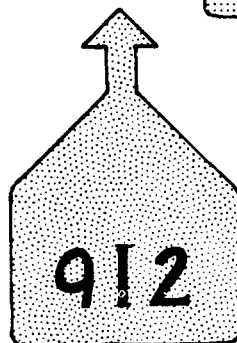
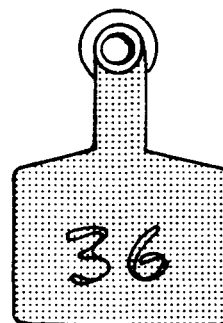
Some purebred breeders place a small metal numbered tag in the calf's ear for quick identification. Later, a herd record number is tattooed in the calf's ear for permanent identification.



Ear tags with open ends slip into a punched hole in the ear.



Aluminum tags are self-piercing with a double hole lock. Special pliers are used for inserting.



Perhaps the most popular type of ear tag is the pliable plastic kind. They come in small, medium and large sizes and in a variety of colors. Paint for writing on the tags comes in a separate tube applicator, or pre-numbered tags can also be purchased. Each brand of ear tag has its own holding device. Most of the pliable plastic tags are inserted with a special knife, and the tag is held in the ear with a flip-out back.