

Brand Inspection of Livestock for North Dakota

By

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Association

This article is adapted from a paper which Mr. Arndt presented before the Annual Meeting of the Mouse River Cattlemen's Association at Minot, North Dakota on March 30, 1946. The operation of the brand inspection service at markets in which our North Dakota cattle are offered for sale is described in detail with particular reference to the services provided by the North Dakota Stockmen's Association. This paper is published as contribution to the history of livestock marketing in this State. (H. L. Walster, Director)

The North Dakota Stockmen's Association as it exists today is the result of a meeting that was held in Medora in 1883. At this meeting A. C. Huidekoper, Marquis DeMores, Henry Boice, Howard Eaton, F. Aldon Eaton, M. Wadsworth, Theodore Roosevelt and others met and organized what was known as a protective cattlemen's association. A committee consisting of DeMores, Boice and Roosevelt was appointed to meet with the Montana Stock Growers Association in 1884 at Miles City to arrange for a joint brand inspection and to discuss other matters of mutual interest. This protective organization flourished for a few years and then became dormant and was later reorganized as the Western North Dakota Stockmen's Association. In 1940 the name was changed to North Dakota Stockmen's Association and I have served as Secretary since that time. The original agreement that was made with the Montana Stock Growers in 1884 is still largely in effect and we still maintain a joint inspection with Montana at various points as well as with other States.

Originally, the brand inspector was somewhat of a private detective hired by stockmen's associations and it was his duty to protect the legitimate cattlemen against loss by straying and theft of his property. This is still his duty although our system has changed and improved with the years. The inspector is constantly on the watch for stolen cattle, for worked-over

brands, for fake bills of sale, for intentional or unintentional diversion of valuable property from its rightful owner so that while our methods have changed somewhat, the responsibilities are the same as they were sixty-three years ago when we first started. The production of beef cattle will always be an important industry in North Dakota and as long as ownership of cat-

tle will be evidenced by brands, brand inspection will be necessary at market centers.

When I became Secretary of the North Dakota Stockmen's Association all of the inspection work on cattle from this State was done by inspectors employed by other State Associations and by the Livestock Commission of Montana. The reason for this was that we had never had a large enough Association nor was there sufficient income from brand inspection fees to maintain full-time inspectors. In December 1941 the Packers and Stock Yards Act was amended by what is known as the Kleberg Amendment which gave to State Associations the authority to maintain brand inspection service at public markets and to collect fees for all cattle handled whether branded or not branded. Subsequently this Association made application to the Department of Agriculture for registration under the Packers and Stock Yards Act of 1921 to conduct brand inspection service at various markets which was approved in August 1943 and on September 1st of that year we took over the active operation of the inspection at the West Fargo market. Today we have two full-time inspectors at West Fargo and by agreement we also inspect cattle for Montana, South Dakota and Wyoming at that market. This agreement is that we inspect their cattle, report to them and for our services we collect the regular fee of 10c per head and we keep the money.

At the same time we made an agreement with the South Dakota Stock Growers Association that they should conduct the

brand inspection service at South St. Paul and we would receive 50% of all the money taken in over and above the expense of operation and if there was a loss, we were to pay 50% of the loss. We operated on this basis for almost a year and we found that the greater portion of the cattle being handled were North Dakota cattle and therefore in June 1944 I met with the Directors of the South Dakota Stock Growers Association at Rapid City and made an agreement with them whereby we took over the South St. Paul Market that we are operating today. We also inspect South Dakota cattle and Wyoming cattle on the same basis as the agreement at West Fargo. We have two full-time inspectors employed there with a third man during the busy season.

With reference to other markets, at Kansas City our inspection is being done by the Wyoming Association, at Omaha by Nebraska, at Sioux City by the South Dakota Association, at Chicago by the Wyoming Association, all on the basis where they inspect our cattle, report to us and they retain the fees. This gives us a rather comprehensive coverage on the central markets and is as complete in that respect as any State has. As other public markets are opened as was done at Billings a couple of years ago, we make new agreements immediately and if any North Dakota cattle come in to there, they are being inspected by the Montana Association, so that you can see that we are leaving very few loop holes

Our original permit from the Department of Agriculture stat-

ed that our territory would be West of the Eastern boundaries of Bottineau, McHenry, Sheridan, Kidder, Logan and McIntosh counties. Last fall we applied for and received permission to include Pierce County. This is the area in North Dakota in which branding is generally done and is recognized as a means of identification, therefore, any cattle shipped to any public market from this area are inspected for brands and a regular fee of 10c charged whether branded or not and each one is handled separately. This entails the handling of a lot of cattle each year. At South St. Paul we inspected 158,275—at West Fargo Union Stock Yards 64,409 head,—at Armour & Company yards at West Fargo 33,723 head and at auction sales rings around the State 54,635 or a total of approximately 311,000 head. This, of course, does not include the cattle inspected for North Dakota by other Associations and other markets which would probably bring the total somewhere near half a million head.

Now with reference to Sales Rings, we employ at this time two full-time men and one part-time man as sales ring inspectors. One of these men lives at Watford City, one at Dickinson and one at Mandan. They inspect cattle at all auction sales in the territory designated to us by the Department of Agriculture and in addition we have an agreement with the Montana Association whereby they inspect North Dakota cattle brought in at Sidney and with the South Dakota Association for inspection at Lemmon, South Dakota and Bowman, North Dakota. The reason they do the inspecting at Bowman,

North Dakota is that a good deal of the cattle sold there are from South Dakota and we made an agreement with that Association that they are to take all of the territory South of the Milwaukee Railroad. It seems to work out very satisfactorily as travel expense would be too great and income not sufficient to meet it and as it is now we are getting a good job done.

I think we have built up a staff of very competent inspectors and they are doing a good job under sometimes difficult circumstances, especially at auction sales rings and while we may make mistakes occasionally I have yet to find any serious error or where anyone has been harmed. The salaries for these inspectors in 1945 amounted to \$13,751.34. This, with stationery, supplies, traveling expense and so forth brings the expense of operating this Association up to more than \$20,000.00 a year so that you can plainly see that we have to watch everything very closely or we could run into financial troubles. We must also maintain a comfortable reserve fund at all times for periods of the year when fees collected for inspection services do not begin to pay the operating expense. On January 1st of this year our cash balance was slightly over \$24,000.00. That has decreased considerably for the reason that cattle shipments were light this winter and while it is necessary to maintain our staff of inspectors, they have had many idle days. It is simply impossible to lay off men during slack periods and then try to pick up new ones when cattle shipments start to come in. We must have experienced men.

A brand inspector must first

of all be a man of good judgment and with a lot of common sense. He might be able to read brands, make up tally sheets and that sort of thing, but if he fails in these two qualifications, we cannot use him. This also requires the keeping of an extensive set of records. For instance, at all public markets we must have a complete set of the brand records of North Dakota, these must be brought up to date periodically as there are many new brands registered and transfers of old brands. We have an arrangement with the State Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor and his brand recording department whereby they furnish all of our inspectors with a list every thirty days of new brands registered and transfers made during that period. Our records at South St. Paul and West Fargo are not all that I should like them to be but they are adequate for this time. To get up a new set of records would require hiring several people to stay at Bismarck for at least a month to copy all of the records down there and we would then have to buy new filing cases and the expense would amount to several thousand dollars. I think it best to try to get along with what we have until such time when the cost will be more reasonable.

There are times in the fall of the year during the heavy shipping season that our inspectors put in long hours and they work seven days a week. For instance, at South St. Paul the cattle to be sold on Monday start coming in on Sunday morning and our inspector will start out early Sunday morning and make inspections far into the night and then go back at it as soon as it is

daylight again in the morning. Authority is granted to us by the Packers and Stock Yards Act to hold up the sale of cattle for a reasonable length of time in order to make a thorough inspection but all inspectors have been instructed to do everything they can to facilitate the quick handling of cattle in the yards. In other words, when your cattle get in, we are going to work them just as fast as we can consistent with doing a good job, so that your cattle can be sold when you want to sell them. The Commission Companies in general have been quite co-operative but we do have an occasional flareup when they could be more so. Generally though our difficulties can be ironed out without any serious trouble and it is a question of give and take on both sides.

All the States with which we have inspection agreements operate on a uniform rule basis, which rules were established at a meeting of the representatives of the Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota and North Dakota Associations at Miles City, Mont. in August 1943. We will probably have one of these meetings again this summer to discuss our common problems. During the War one of the serious difficulties that we had was the question of keeping competent inspectors.

I would like to talk to you briefly about brand inspection systems as carried on in other States for while we operate under a uniform rule agreement, not all have the same official setup. In South Dakota it is practically the same as in North Dakota, that is, they have a State Association which is authorized to conduct a brand inspection

service at the various public markets by the Department of Agriculture. In Nebraska they have a straight political setup with the Secretary of the State as the Chief Inspector. In Wyoming there is a semi-official setup whereby the Wyoming Stock Growers Association is a sort of a public organization which has specific authority from the State Legislature to conduct brand inspection outside of the boundaries of the State for the State of Wyoming. Their books are audited annually by the State Examiner and they also receive an annual appropriation from the State Legislature. All this, in spite of the fact it is a private organization made up of ranchers and farmers who pay dues and that all funds collected for brand inspection fees are paid into the Association. This is the only organization of its kind in the United States and seems to function rather for the reason that the State of Wyoming is a ranching country and has no large farming and dairy areas such as we have in North Dakota therefore the State Legislature is made of ranchers who, while they may not always have control, have the balance of power.

That brings us to the State of Montana about which I would like to talk for just a short time and explain their setup, as I am firmly convinced that we should have a similar setup in North Dakota and as a matter of fact, Mr. Kennedy who is the President of our Association, Mr. Eaton and myself are going to meet with the Montana Live Stock Commission at Helena April 8th for the purpose of getting enough information to make

a recommendation at our Annual Meeting. The Montana Stock Growers Association has no brand inspection setup. It is a purely service organization. All of the inspection work is done by the Montana Live Stock Commission which is composed of men who are actually producers who draw no pay except when they are in session and who must be appointed from names submitted by the Stock Growers Association. They have done a remarkable job in keeping out of politics and from my contact with them, I feel that they are doing the best brand inspection job of any State in this western area including North Dakota. I am not prepared to say too much about the operation of the Live Stock Commission at this time with the exception of the fact that they are charged with the responsibility of administering all laws with reference to live stock in the State of Montana and that they collect all the fees for brand inspection. They pay them into the State Treasury and from this source they derive a considerable portion of the revenue required to operate the Commission. In North Dakota we are faced with an entirely different situation. We have a very definite division of authority in our State Capitol.

It should always be remembered that the North Dakota Stockmen's Association is rendering brand inspection service to all cattlemen living in the Western part of the State whether they are members of our Association or not and that this service is rendered impartially on that basis. We have sometimes been criticised for not doing certain things and on the

other hand for doing some things which a few people think we should not. We have built up a very good organization for brand inspection service which can be turned over to the State exactly as it is now and it is on a self-supporting basis. We should always keep in mind that the North Dakota Stockmen's Association is an organization of private citizens supported by membership dues and that we will never be able to derive enough of an income to police the entire cattle industry as it should be. A good deal of the cattle rustling could be done away with and should be done away with.

There are a few things that I would like to bring to your attention that will assist our inspectors in doing a better job of giving you better service. First, when you do get into a public market with a shipment of cattle, especially during the busy season, be as patient with the inspector as possible. You can be of considerable help in sorting out cattle of different brands and producing proper evidence that you do have ownership. Never sell branded cattle without giving a bill of sale and by this I mean that you should insist on giving a bill of sale to the buyer, who ever he is, so that the proceeds of shipments will not be held up.

Some Branding "Don'ts"

Don't try to brand with anything but a hot iron. Don't let

the iron get red hot as that starts a hair fire and that usually results in a poor brand. At proper heat the iron is the color of ashes. Don't use a forge or a coal fire. Wood is the best fuel for branding fire. Don't use branding acid. It usually leaves a scar instead of a brand and often causes a bad sore. The result is generally unreadable. Don't use a small branding iron. Don't use a thin or burned up iron as it will cut too deep and make a thin scar which covers over with hair. Don't join two or more letters or characters in one iron. Such an iron will never heat or burn even and is sure to slip and make a distorted or blotched brand. Don't try to brand a wet or even a damp animal. The brand will scald and leave a blotch or even a bad sore or no brand at all. Don't put the iron in the hands of an amateur. Don't get in a hurry. The cow will wear the brand all her life and you want it to always bring her home. Don't get tender hearted. The iron must burn deep enough to remove hair and outer layer or skin. When the iron is lifted the brand should be the color of saddle leather. Don't be afraid of a big brand. Make your brand as big as will go on the designated part of a calf. It is a myth that big plain brands affect sale or price of cattle. Some of the best branded herds in North Dakota regularly top markets and win prizes at shows.