

The Importance of Tagging in Cattle

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Cattle tagging is important and provides many benefits

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) states that 92.6 million head of cattle exist in farms in America. Keeping track of these animals is difficult. Tagging cattle, usually with an ear tag with a unique identity number, provides many benefits for management and production, and also helps with disease control and traceability.

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1. Identification

- As cattle look similar to each other, distinguishing between different animals is difficult. Tagging provides a method of identifying each animal and helps with keeping records of the animal's past. Proper identification enables tracking of an animal's performance, helping with decisions on which animals should be culled or sold. Tagging provides clear evidence of ownership when cattle herds become mixed, preventing loss of stock or ownership disputes. Some cattle tags use radio frequency identification systems (RFID), making identifying and record management even more efficient.

Breeding and Culling

- Tagging cattle enables tracking of age and breeding history of individual animals. Knowing when animals are suitable for breeding or require culling is part of good cattle herd management. Tagging provides easy access to records for establishing the performance of a breeding animal and helping to identify when new heifers are needed to replenish stock. Tagging also helps track the progress of calves, identifying when they are mature enough for breeding or culling.

Disease Traceability

- Since 2010, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) made tagging with official ear tags, for the purpose of animal disease traceability, mandatory for all cattle that cross state lines. Outbreaks of disease, such as foot-and-mouth, tuberculosis and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), severely damage the cattle industry, as witnessed in several European outbreaks. Cattle tagging provides proper traceability for containment of contaminated herds, reducing the spread of infection by identifying every location each animal has lived.

Other Benefits

- With a traceability and tagging system in place, age and source verification give consumers knowledge of where their beef comes from. This sort of traceability offers premium beef sellers opportunities to develop a brand for their cattle business. With tagging, the ease of record retrieval helps improve the quality of herds, enabling genetic diversity and evaluation of an individual animal's influence on meat quality.

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