

Tattooing your stud animals

Why Tattoo? For one it is a requirement of Hereford Australia that Stud animals have an ear tattoo as a permanent way of identifying an animal. You do not need to tattoo steers.

A tattoo is the only permanent way of identifying an animal if their management tags and records are lost. Recently our member Dianne from Shady Creek was able to positively identify some of her cattle that had changed hands several times and lost their ear tags by checking for her tattoo. As a consequence, registered animals were not lost as a result of another person's poor record keeping.

The tattoo should include your three letter Stud Identification and the individual animal year of birth letter and three digit identification number. While HAL suggest that the whole number should be in one ear, and they suggest the left ear, it does not contravene their requirement to put the stud ID in one ear and the animal ID in the other.

Below is a quick summary of the process of tattooing which is usually carried out at the time of weaning.

To tattoo cattle will require tattoo pliers, numbers or letters made of sharp, needle like projections which pierce the skin and tattoo ink or paste. Green shows up better in dark coloured ears and you can use a roll on for a less messy way of application. We have recently purchased a Stone brand set of pliers with a rotating head so you can load stud letters on one side and animal ID on the other and use the same set of pliers for both marks. I look forward to telling you how they go in due course.

Gather your tools.

Biosecurity protocol should be followed by working in an environment that is as clean as possible. Other measures to decrease spread of disease include wearing gloves, using separate cloths or pads to clean cattle ears and disinfecting equipment between animals.

Below is a list of recommended materials used to tattoo cattle.

- Gloves
- Halter
- Alcohol pads or rubbing alcohol and a soft, clean cloth
- Spray bottle of rubbing alcohol
- Tattoo ink
- Tattoo kit

A good Cattle Tattoo Kit will include Tattoo Pliers and 3/8" needle digits in both numbers and letters of the alphabet. Be sure your cattle tattoo equipment is properly maintained at all times. Always be ready by keeping it clean and replacing broken or dull characters in both letters and numbers. Keep a close eye out for a build up of dirt or broken or dull equipment to avoid improper or illegible tattoos.



Clean the ear of dirt and wax using a clean cloth and some soapy water or rubbing alcohol. Apply a generous amount of ink over the area to be tattooed, usually between the middle ribs of the ear. Keep away from the hair around the edge of the ear. An area slightly larger than the tattoo equipment should be covered. You may find it a little messy but it is convenient to apply green paste ink with your finger.



Hold the animal securely. After verifying the correct tattoo by punching it into a piece of paper, position the tattoo pliers in the center of the ear between the ribs of cartilage and squeeze firmly. Avoiding the ribs will prevent bleeding. Be sure to lift the tongs out straight to avoid ruining the tattoos with scratches.



Reapply the ink after you have followed the above procedure. Your finger or an old toothbrush may be used to help push the ink into the punctures. In case of slight bleeding it is good to rub the ink in until bleeding stops so it does not wash out of the needle hole.

Sanitize the tattoo kit between animals by spraying rubbing alcohol on the pliers and the individual tattoo pieces that have been used. This cleaning will minimize infection in the tattoo and should be done before and after each procedure.



After several weeks, the ink will dry and flake out of the ear, leaving a legible tattoo and a permanent means of identification.

A summary of the April meeting discussion written by Sandra of Sandrian Park Miniature Herefords.