

Livestock Branding in Oklahoma

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The beef cattle industry is a dynamic business that must continually adjust to market signals, public opinion, state and national policies, and other industry issues. Branding cattle to show ownership and legal title and record keeping have been promoted and practiced by cattlemen in the western states for the last 150 years. However, in recent years, questions have been raised concerning the humane treatment of cattle with respect to certain management practices, and the impact of those practices on the overall value of a beef product and/or by-products.

For example, of the 56,612 head of fed cattle evaluated by the 1995 National Beef Quality Audit, 52.3% were branded, 6.2% had multiple brands, and 16.8% exhibited side brands that generally ranged in size from 50 to 100 square inches. Side brands and multiple brands significantly reduce drop credits to packers, thereby reducing the value of the entire animal (approximately \$10 per head). The audit suggested that by simply moving the location of a brand from the rib to the hip, producers could add value to the hide and create a "win-win" situation for themselves and beef industry customers.

Why Brand?

Branding today is still the most recognized and accepted means of indicating ownership of cattle in North America. Eventually, other methods such as electronic "chipping" may become the standard for identification, but until this procedure becomes a more economical and practical alternative, producers will continue to utilize the time-tested, permanent, and universal method of branding.

Summary of Oklahoma Brand Laws

Those applying for state brand registration must complete and file the Application for Registration of Brands and Marks with the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association Brand Division, Box 82395, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73148. The application must be accompanied by a \$20.00 registration fee. Upon approval, a brand certificate will be mailed to the applicant indicating the brand registered. All brands approved by the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association (OCA) will appear in the following brand book or supplement printed.

All brands must be renewed at the beginning of each five year registration period, regardless of when the brand was

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registered. State registered brand owners will be notified by mail before the five year registration period ends. At this time, brands are renewed prior to publication of the newest Oklahoma Brand Book.

- A brand is defined as a permanent mark not less than three inches in length or diameter and burned into the hide with a hot iron. "Freeze branding" is also a form of identifying animal ownership. Acid brands are not recognized as state registration.
- Single unit brands including one initial, number, bar, slash, or quarter circle are not accepted as forms of state registration.
- 3. Each brand registration must be confined to one location on the animal. When the same brand is used on two sites, two applications must be filed. Brands must be registered in the following eight positions ONLY: left neck, left shoulder, left rib, left hip, right neck, right shoulder, right rib, and right hip. However, previously registered Oklahoma brand positions are not affected (O.S. 2, Sections 405). The left jaw is reserved for the use of B and T brands, identifying cattle having a detectable antibody titer for Brucellosis and Tuberculosis.
- Applicants are required by law to list, in order of preference, three distinct brands and three positions on the animal for application of the brand.
- 5. State registration of your brand is not required by law. Recorded brands, however, take precedence over similar unrecorded brands when questions of ownership arise, placing the burden of proof on unregistered brand users in the event of controversy. Registered brands are prima facie evidence of ownership in a court of law.

Brand books are furnished to county sheriffs, county extension agents, vocational agricultural instructors, and libraries without charge. They can be purchased by the public from OCA at a price equal to the cost of preparation, printing, and delivery.

Where, When, and How to Brand

When ownership brands are applied it is best to use hot brands. The clarity of the application can be determined shortly after branding, and animal-to-animal variation does not affect the end results as greatly as with freeze branding. A good hot brand is recognizable because it destroys hair follicles located under several layers of skin and leaves a permanent bald scar on the hide of the animal.

Identification and ownership brands can be applied at any time during the year, but this procedure is usually performed in combination with one or more practices such as weaning, castration, and vaccination. Calves are usually branded before or during weaning because the probability of a calf straying is greater after weaning.

Good brands can be achieved by properly heating the irons until they appear a silvery-gray (similar to the color of ashes) in the daylight, but glow a cherry-red color when held in a dark area. Clipping excessive hair growth or mud from the hide area to be branded, and keeping irons clean at all times with a steel brush to remove hair, dirt, and other debris are management practices which should be utilized. The irons can be heated in a wood fire (bed of coals) or a propane (bottled) gas fire. An electric branding iron can be used successfully after a certain amount of experience is gained.

The size of the iron is important. Each character should be (in outside measurements) 4" x 3" for calves less than one year old and 6" x 3 1/2" for older cattle. The face width of the branding iron should be 1/4" to 1/2" wide, with the surface edges slightly rounded. All circles and corners should be vented to prevent excessive scarring. Again, in utilizing the "value added" approach, the branding location is restricted to the hip. This should be the first consideration, as the brand registry may require an applicant to move their chosen location (thigh, shoulder) or choose a different design in order for the brand to be registered.

Tips on Fire Branding Procedures

Catch the calf's head in the headgate of a squeeze chute, then squeeze to restrict motion. Heat the branding irons to the proper temperature as previously described. Firmly press the ash-gray colored branding iron against the hide and rock the handle slightly to vary the pressure, allowing for uniform application of the entire character.

The color of the branded hide should be light tan, similar to the color of new saddle leather. If the iron is the proper temperature and the cattle have a light (summer) hair coat, the brand should be held for no more than three to five seconds. Cattle with a heavy (winter) hair coat should be clipped before branding. Otherwise, the brand requires an application of five to ten seconds.

Do not brand wet animals. An iron applied to a wet animal loses temperature rapidly and tends to scald rather than burn the hide. The result is a serious, slow-healing scar that is hard to read. Apply one iron at a time, taking caution to avoid slippage on the hide. Place brand numbers or characters at least one inch apart. Be sure the branding iron is clean and free of hair before it is used again.

If a second application is necessary to "touch-up" a spot, or more burn is needed, the procedure should be done with extreme care. The iron must be placed in the exact position of the first application so the character does not blotch.

It is best to brand when flies are not a problem. If they are present, apply a small amount of insecticide to the brand area to prevent infection. A light application of oil or grease to the area will also aid in smoother, faster peeling.

Freeze Branding

Freeze branding (cryogenic branding) of cattle with super-chilled irons has been developed within the past 30 years, and is recognized as a legal method of ownership and animal identification in Oklahoma. With this method, the hair of a freeze branded animal is discolored or white due to damage by contact with extreme cold to the melanocytes (color producing cells) of the hair. However, the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association recommends that hot iron brands be used for ownership purposes.

Freeze branding has not fulfilled all of the early expectations for the technique, though some people have been satisfied with the results. Drawbacks of the process include:

- Brand sites need to be clipped in the winter for complete clarity.
- The process is relatively expensive on small numbers of cattle.
- Visibility of the brand is not as distinct on yellow, white, or red cattle as on black cattle.

Freeze branding materials include:

- 1) Hair clippers, brush, and squirt bottle.
- 2) Branding irons (preferably copper, or brass heads).
- 3) Insulated container for coolant.
- 4) Alcohol (95% ethyl, methyl, or isopropyl) or acetone.
- 5) Dry ice or liquid nitrogen.

Tips on Freeze Branding Procedures

Factors critical to the success of freeze branding include properly cooled irons, uniform pressure on the brand site, and correct timing.

Key steps of the procedure include:

- 1) Cool irons in alcohol and dry ice, or liquid nitrogen.
- 2) Restrain the animal in a headgate and squeeze chute.
- 3) Clip area to be branded closely.
- 4) Clean brand site by brushing and wet thoroughly with alcohol from a squirt bottle or sponge.
- Firmly hold the iron in place on the brand site for the necessary time.

Timing	Calves	Mature Cattle
Alcohol and Dry Ice	40 seconds	60 seconds
Liquid Nitrogen	10-15 seconds	22-25 seconds

How to Read a Brand

Brands are read from left to right and top to bottom. Figures, symbols, letters, and numbers will become easily recognizable with practice (see Fig. 1). An alternative to the more customary and traditional brand symbols is the angle brand system (see Fig. 2). This universal identification system is based on two concentric squares designed by U.S.D.A. Agricultural Research Service workers.

In the basic square, numbering starts with 2 (in the top left corner) and continues clockwise to the other three corners as 4, 6, and 8. Odd numbered angles are indicated by a second square rotated 1/8 of a turn to the right (clockwise). The top angle (corner of second square) is designated as the number 3 with the 5, 7, and 9 angles following in the same clockwise manner. Two adjacent vertical lines, as with the number "11," represents the number 1. Two adjacent horizontal lines, or an "equals" sign (=), depicts the number 0.

These identification marks can be applied with either hot or cold branding techniques. Furthermore, these angles proved to be more easily read than numbers in recognition trials. A derivative of this system is used on the research herd at the OSU Eastern Branch Research Station near Haskell, Oklahoma.

Figure 1. Traditional Brand Symbols

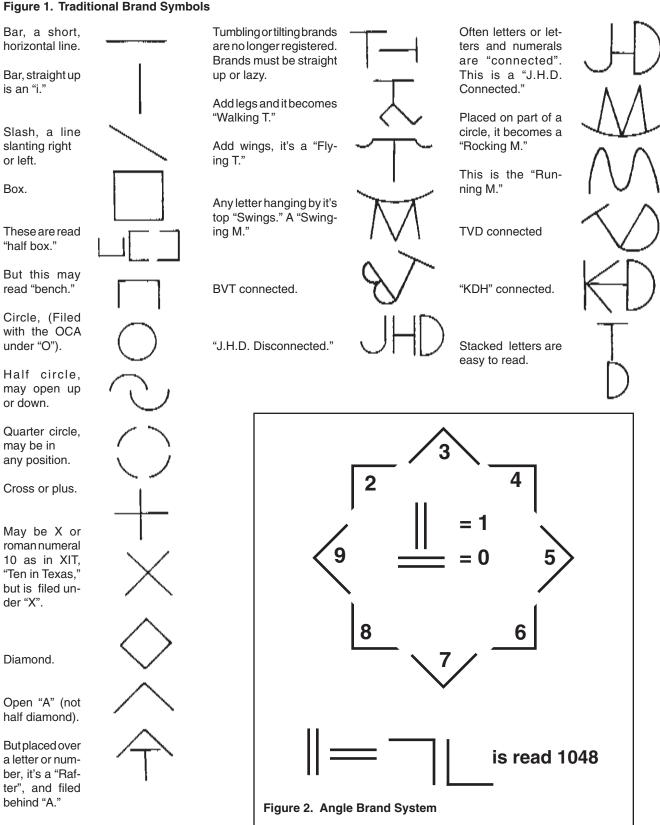
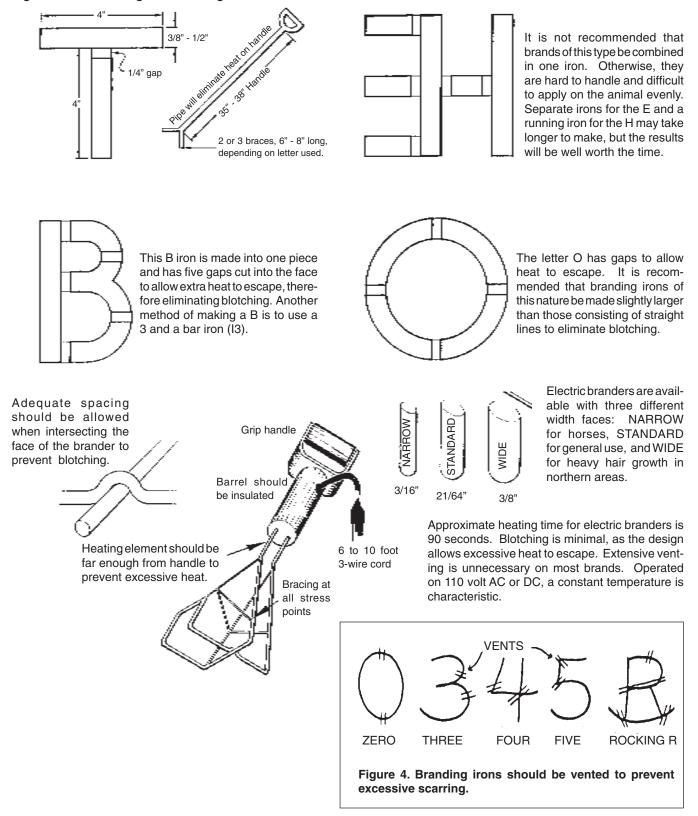


Figure 3. Constructing and Branding Iron.



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