

Choose Ear Tags Wisely

There are lots of options for cattle ear tags, the kind you choose matters long term.

Story & photo by PAIGE NELSON, field editor

It never fails to happen on my family's ranch. We tag every calf when we process him or her at birth. Two or three months later at branding, there's always at least one (usually two or three) to come through without a tag. Since we sort cattle into different herds at branding, this conundrum puts a huge question mark on where that calf belongs. Is its mother a red, yellow, orange, blue, green, purple or white tag?

Most cattlemen know individual cattle identification (ID) is crucial to keeping accurate cattle records. However, according to Darin Burns with Datamars Inc., there's no use putting a tag in if you're going to have it fall out later. Hear hear!

During his live presentation titled, "Tag Tech + Your Op = Pure Profit" at the Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show hosted in Phoenix, Ariz., Feb. 2, Burns offered tagging and tag selection tips to his audience.

Ear tag choice truly matters.

First, do you need a short-term or long-term tag? There are several differences: Long-term tags cost more, are of higher quality, use better ink to ensure long life of the number and usually take more time to install. Short-term tags are more cost-effective (30¢ vs. \$1.25 for long-term tags) and allow fast tagging, but lifetime of the print number is shorter.

Electronic identification (eID) tags are great for traceability and storing information. Data like birth date, birth weight, dam information, sire information, etc., can be easily stored and passed on using eID tags.

Things to consider when selecting eID tags, Burns said, are the environments in which the tags will be scanned. In

dairies, for instance, there may be a lot of interference between the tag and the reader because of all the metal and equipment.

"Select a tag and reader that will work for you at a distance you desire," said Burns.

Once the right kind of tag is selected, proper installation is required to keep it there.

Burns' general recommendations for tagging baby calves are:

- Tag close to the head in the center of the ear, without getting into the thick part of the ear.
- One person holds the calf, another person stretches the ear skin tight with one hand and tags with the other.
- The further out the tag is in the ear, the more likely it is to fall out or to be torn out.
- If you see blood on the ear after the calf is tagged, make note of it as that tag is more likely to fall out.
- Train employees on proper tag placement. Don't assume they know how or where to tag.

Tag applicators need maintenance, too. Burns advises people ensure the applicator needle is straight, slick (no burrs) and lubricated, so the tag easily slides on and off.



Editor's Note: Paige Nelson is a freelance writer and cattlegirl from Rigby, Idaho. This article was written as part of Angus Media's coverage of the 2018 Cattle Industry Convention and is copyrighted. See additional coverage distributed through Angus Media channels including the Angus Journal, Angus Beef Bulletin, Angus Beef Bulletin EXTRA, The Angus Report and online at www.angus.org.



Proper placement of an ear tag will help set it up for long-term staying power. Tag close to the head in the center of the ear, without getting into the thick part of the ear. Darin Burns suggests when tagging in the pasture, one person hold the calf and another person stretch the ear skin tight with one hand and tag with the other.

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