

The Source



by **GINETTE KURTZ**, *American Angus Association*

To tag or not to tag, that is the question

I know that phrase will make somebody scream, but I can't get it out of my head after helping my son with some homework and talking to producers on the phone lately.

I'll bet some of you have calves on the ground now. Did you tag them at birth? Will you tag them at weaning? Maybe you plan on branding them later?

Identification is a tough decision, and there is no one-size-fits-every-operation option.

Why should you identify your calves? I read an interesting article the other day that mentioned commercial producers didn't get paid to tag their calves or didn't make enough money to get chased by mean mama cows.

Since I'm a crazy commercial producer who tags calves at birth, let me tell you what I have seen.

A first-calf heifer didn't claim her calf and because the calf was tagged and wasn't doing well, I pulled the pair in and did my best to get her to claim the calf. No luck; it turned into a bottle calf for the kids. Next year when she calved, it was the same story, so off she went.

This year we had six sets of twins. It was easy to tell which calf each cow

claimed when they have a tag.

Once in a while, a female doesn't produce enough milk for her baby. You notice the calf robbing off the other cows. It is pretty easy to spot and take care of the problem rather than have two calves that don't gain well. You also know which cow needs to take a trailer ride.

On Jan. 1, 2014, a 527-pound (lb.) calf brought \$200.80 per hundredweight (cwt.) at the Saint Joseph (Mo.) Stockyards. That equates to \$1,058.22 lost if the calf isn't sold. I checked several Internet sources citing the cost to keep a cow for a year. One cited feed costs in 2013 at \$670, and a \$900 total cost per female, including labor, vaccinations and capital investment. From where I'm sitting, that puts the cost of losing a year of production from a cow that doesn't produce a calf for market at \$1,728-\$1,958.

Tags make you money

I do get paid to tag calves — anywhere from \$1,700-\$1,950 — by getting rid of a "slacker cow." Why carry females that are open, calve late or don't milk? Those girls don't contribute their fair share, and

for the price you can receive for them on the market, it doesn't make sense to keep them.

Some producers tell me they can make all those management decisions about who didn't calve and which calves did the best without tagging. Good for you! However, our operation has several family members who look at the cattle, and it is pretty hard to explain to my 79-year-old mother who has cataracts which black cow or calf needs to be checked. At 5:30 a.m. it is pretty dark when I do chores, and they all look black, so an ear tag in the calf is sanity to me.

Yes, I have been chased by a cow when tagging the calf. Thank goodness the few times I have been caught didn't result in too much wear and tear, but that doesn't mean I stopped identifying our calves.

In the article mentioned before, the source said, "I would not have any cattle left if I sold all the mean ones." I wonder if they know about the docility expected progeny difference (EPD)? Ask your seedstock producer to see all the available data and EPDs for each bull you could potentially purchase. If you would like more information on how to interpret

EPDs or bull-buying tips, visit www.angus.org.

Another year and another calving season will be here before you know it. The American Angus Association knows there are many black-hided calves in the marketplace today. Enroll your calf crop in AngusSource Genetic this year to set your Angus-sired calves apart.

Enrollment is easy and the benefits far outweigh the cost. Each enrolled calf will be identified in two ways. The first is the neon green, tamper-evident AngusSource Genetic ear tag. The second is the data-driven Marketing Document that you complete online or over the phone once you know when and where you plan to market your enrolled calves. This leading-edge Marketing Document is designed to show potential buyers the genetic quality of your calf crop and is backed by a powerful American Angus Association database.

To tag or not to tag? There is only one answer — the AngusSource Genetic tag.



Editor's Note: *Ginette Kurtz is manager of AngusSource Genetic for the American Angus Association.*