

UTAH BRAND INSPECTIONS

Who isn't in awe at the unbelievable value of cattle? Young calves, feeder steers and heifers, even cull cows and older bulls are more valuable than they have ever been. Thinking contract prices offered several weeks ago was incredible, many producers formally committed their calves to buyers. Now they are wishing they still had the option of selling on the open market. There appears to be no indication that prices will soften. That's happy news for cattle producers. Too bad I sold all my cattle a few years ago when I became too busy to take care of them.

Utah law states that all cattle that forage on open range must be branded with a Utah recorded brand. It is recommended that all cattle not grazing on open range also be branded with a recorded brand, but some producers have become negligent about that. The major benefits of branding livestock are to reduce the possibility of theft and to assist in the return of stray cattle. Certified brand inspectors, hired by Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF), have the responsibility of documenting the movement of cattle within the state and also across state lines. Brand inspections are required by law whenever there is a change of ownership, when animals are going to slaughter, or whenever cattle are crossing state lines. Even cattle that are not branded are required to obtain a brand inspection. Sometimes we consider this requirement to be a hassle, but it's for our own protection and benefit.

When traveling within the state, owners or truckers should always carry proof of ownership. Acceptable items to prove ownership include the wallet sized brand card matching the brand on the cattle, a brand inspection certificate showing the animals are purchased, an auction invoice, or registration papers for pedigreed animals. A bill of sale does not serve as proof of ownership. When transporting cattle that belong to someone else, truckers should carry written permission from the owner. All cattle should be rebranded with the new owners brand within 30 days of purchase. Again, this requirement is for the protection of the new owner so cattle cannot disappear so easily.

In an effort to increase efficiency and accuracy, officials with the UDAF are now transitioning to electronic livestock brand and health inspections. A recent UDAF news release explains that new electronic software will allow inspectors to conduct brand and/or health inspections in the field and electronically upload the data to the UDAF offices in real time. Cody James, Livestock Inspection Bureau Chief, UDAF said; "It will improve efficiency, reduce errors when calculating fees, and help us better track livestock that are sold, shipped out of state, or sent to slaughter." When completed, Utah will be one of the first states using an electronic animal inspection system.

Currently inspectors compile bi-weekly reports of all their inspections and send them to the main office in Salt Lake City, where the information is filed. It can take two to four weeks for that information to be available for tracking livestock. Inspections often take place just before animals are transported out of state, or when they are sold. If the paper inspection certificate is lost or misplaced, it can be difficult for officials at the port of entry or at livestock auctions to verify ownership of the cattle. The new electronic system will speed up that process and improve efficiency in tracking the sale and movement of animals. Current photographs of the animals can also be uploaded electronically and placed on file with the inspection certificate. Paper certificates will still be signed in the field, but the form will be filled out

electronically using a laptop computer or tablet. The new system will also save brand inspectors time because addresses and other information will already be on file, saving time and reducing errors.

The new electronic system will be ready for testing soon, and should be in full use by early 2015. When perfected, this system will benefit livestock owners because it significantly enhances traceability. It is one more tool that can reduce livestock theft and potentially increase recovery rates when animals are stolen.

Cache County is fortunate to have two brand inspectors who become extremely busy when beef calves are being weaned and shipped. Chris Chambers (435-760-7016) covers the north end of the county and Matt Bailey (435-760-7015) does most of his work in the south end of the valley. They obviously appreciate some lead time when planning their schedules. They also have the reputation of being helpful and accommodating. As with all good inspectors, they can become hard-nosed and grumpy when needed. Since brand laws are for the benefit of livestock owners and for the accountability of thieves, it only makes sense for producers to work cooperatively with our appointed brand inspectors.