2010/12

HOT IRON BRANDING FOR BEEF CATTLE

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Branding has been practised by cattle owners for many years to prove the ownership of an animal. The Animal Identification Act, 2002 (Act No. 6 of 2002), states that it is law that all cattle in South Africa have to be branded. Either hot iron or freeze branding can be done. Hot iron branding is recommended for beef cattle.

The Animal Identification Act, 2002 (Act No. 6 of 2002), stipulates the following:

- Each cattle owner must apply for the registration of an identification mark from the Registrar of Animal Identification. An application fee has to been paid. The Registrar of Animal Identification has to be notified if the cattle owner changes his or her address.
- All cattle have to be branded (either freeze or hot iron branding) with the identification mark that has been allocated by the Registrar of Animal Identification.
- 3. Calves have to be branded by six months of age.
- 4. Purchased animals must be branded within 14 days after he/she becomes the owner of the animal.
- 5. Branding irons must be between 40 mm and 100 mm wide and between 40 mm and 100 mm high.
- 6. The brand can be placed anywhere on the animal except the neck. The brand is usually three symbols (can be 2 or 1). The arrangement of the brand on the animal must be any one of the following options:

A AB ABC A A A BC B B BC A C

NOTE that the following arrangement of the brand on the animal is **incorrect:**

AB C

The spacing between and below the letters is 20 mm. Additional brands (successive owners) must be 50 mm away from previous brands. Additional brands may not brand over existing brands. No blotting out of brands is allowed.

7. An alternative method of identification has been made for feedlot animals. Instead of being branded by six months of age they have to be tattooed by six months of age. A tattooed animal only has to be branded by the age that the first pair of incisors (two-tooth stage) is cut.

APPLICATION FORMS (Application for Registration of an Identification Mark). These can be downloaded from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries website (www.daff.gov.za).

Contact details are: Tel: (012) 3197449/33; Private Bag X 138, Pretoria, 0001

BRANDING IRONS can be ordered and purchased through the local farmer co-operative.

METHOD OF HOT IRON BRANDING

- 1. Choose the branding site (usually the hind leg, rump or shoulder).
- Restrain the animal in an animal handling facility. Ideally, the use of a neck clamp can help minimize the stress to the animal and to the person who is carrying out the branding.
- Branding irons need to be hot (heated in a branding box by gas (see Figure 1) or on a fire).



Figure 1: Branding irons heating in a branding box.

4. The aim is to burn the skin of the animal; the burnt area of the letters/symbols appears to be a golden brown colour if done correctly (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: An example of a hot iron brand on an animal (correct procedure). The letters on the skin have a golden brown appearance.

Apply the branding iron to the skin of the animal for approximately three seconds (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: An example of a person carrying out the procedure of hot iron branding on an animal (correct procedure).

The length of time that a branding iron is applied to an animal's skin depends on the heat of the branding iron. If the branding iron is too cool, or not held against the animal for sufficient time, then only a temporary hair brand will result (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: An example of when the branding irons are too cool (incorrect procedure). Only the hair has been burnt and the brand will fade in time.

If the branding iron is too hot, or held against the skin for too long, then the area around the intended letter or symbol will be burnt as well, resulting in an unclear brand (see the last letter in Figure 5).



Figure 5: An example of when the branding irons are too hot – especially the last letter (incorrect procedure). The area around the intended letter has been burnt as well. The "K" is an example of uneven pressure when branding.

Avoid allowing the branding iron to slip as it breaks the skin around the intended letter/symbol, resulting in a smudged brand. Ideally, dead skin and hair should be cleaned off the branding irons, between animals.

- 5. Cold water should be applied to the branded area on the animal to cool it down.
- 6. A few weeks after an animal has been branded (as in Figure 2), a scab of the burnt area forms and then falls off. After that the brand appears pink (see Figure 6). The identification mark is now permanent. Sometimes the hair will grow out through the branded area, but it will still be visible (permanent).



Figure 6: A few weeks later the brand on the animal appears pink (correct procedure).

For further information:

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