

Freeze Branding

With more and more black cattle out there many breeders are looking for ways to identify their animals. Some want to do all their cows, others just the donors and pathfinders. Whatever your reason, freeze branding is an excellent way to permanently identify your cattle. You can use a ranch brand or a herd ID brand or both. **You will need a good squeeze chute.**

If your just getting started and don't have a ranch brand, your County courthouse should be your first stop. All brands are registered on a county by county basis. All brands in Texas were purged in 2000 so just because your grandfather used a brand 30 years ago it won't be on the books now. After checking to see no one else is using the brand you want, register the brand while your there. Now you are ready to order your brand.

The cast bronze brands have ample weight and temperature holding capacity to allow you to brand your livestock in less time and still produce a better brand. Custom brands can be ordered from many places, but I used L & H Mfg. Co. in Mandan, ND, they also have sets of numerals and letters.

The sizes of brands are measured in single character and range from 1" to 6" in height. The face thickness is either 3/8 "or 9/16". The 3 1/2" with a 9/16" face is the size I have found works best on all sizes of cattle.

We brand at about 8 months of age or older and the cattle need to be in good flesh. Thin cattle can be branded but with poor results. Place your brands in fleshy areas, trying to brand on a bone doesn't work very well.

There are two methods you can use to cool your irons, liquid nitrogen or a combination of denatured alcohol and dry ice. We prefer the denatured alcohol and dry ice method. Denatured alcohol has to be 99.9% pure or it will freeze and become slushy. Most veterinary or agriculture supply stores will either carry it or can get it. Dry ice is carried by many grocery stores.

Use a large plastic cooler. **Breaking the ice in smaller pieces will cool better than leaving it in a slab.** Once the bottom of the cooler is covered in ice, pour in the denatured alcohol. You want enough to cover the brands setting on top the ice by at least an inch. The brands need to cool for 15 minutes before the first brand is started. You will notice a buildup of frost on the handles of the iron. When this occurs, the brands are ready to use.

The area to be branded needs to be cleaned and clipped prior to branding. We use a regular flathead clipper with a normal blade, but not surgical. It is important not to take too much hair off the area to be branded because of the risk of burning the skin rather than killing the hair pigment. If you clip the area in a

straight or square manner it will give you a guide for placing the irons, making a much more attractive brand.

After the area is clipped and cleaned apply a generous amount of room temperature denatured alcohol on the area where the brand is to be placed. You can do this with a spray bottle or sponge. Once the area is wet, place the cold iron on the animal. You will need a timer or clock with a second hand where you can see is. Mounted on the squeeze chute is preferable. The length of time the brand is on the animal is 50 seconds.

Try to keep the brand on all parts of the skin surface for the entire 50 seconds using a fairly strong amount of pressure to hold the iron in place. After a few seconds the animal may jump and try to move around. If you loose contact with the area, simple put the brand back on outline that was left and continue.

Later the hair will start to raise or peel off (brand was on a little too long). It will take about 30 days for the hair to turn white.

We can do about 7 to 8 cows an hour. Trying to rush the process, say you are just using one brand, won't give the branding iron time to re-cool.

Freeze branding is not the place to take short cuts. If you start to run out of dry ice either put some more in or quit. Brands not cold enough will result in incomplete or dim brands.

Source – Mike Phinney, Director