

# AGRICULTURAL GUIDE

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Branding

## Branding livestock

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Branding is a long-recognized and widely used means of identifying livestock. It is an excellent method of identifying ownership, and good legible brands may offer protection against livestock theft. In range areas, branding is essential for establishing ownership at roundup time.

In the past, Missouri law provided for registration of brands at the county level, which only prevented duplication within a county. Increased cattle rustling the past few years brought renewed interest in branding.

Missouri's 76th General Assembly responded to the livestock industry by providing for brand registry at the state level. This Guide includes the essential points of the Missouri Livestock Brand Registry Law.

### Missouri branding law and registry

1. It is unlawful to use any ownership brand for branding horses, cattle, sheep, mules or asses unless the brand has been properly recorded with the State Commissioner of Agriculture.

2. Recorded brands must be renewed each five years.

3. The only legal brand for ownership purposes is a hot iron brand on the hide of the animal. Other types of brands may be used for within-herd identification.

4. Brands must be at least 3 inches in height and width and contain at least two characters, which may be symbols, letters, Arabic numerals, or a combination of these.

5. Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4) can be used for within-herd identification purposes and need not be recorded. These identification numbers must be at least 10 inches from the ownership brand.

6. Ownership brands can be applied in one of six locations. Facing the rear of the animal, these are: right hip, right rib, right shoulder, and left hip, left rib, left shoulder.

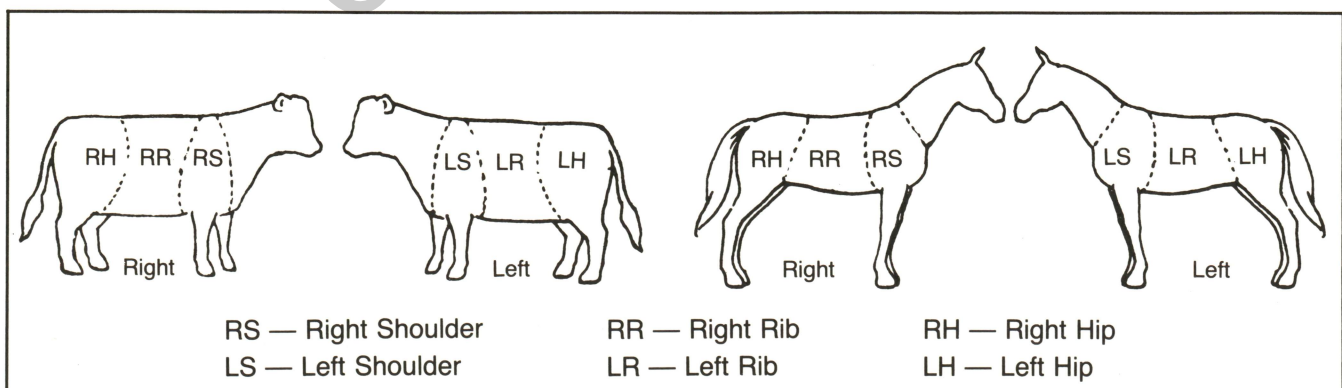
7. A legally registered brand is prima facie evidence in questions of livestock ownership. It is important that you receive and retain a bill of sale showing transfer of ownership of branded animals.

8. The initial cost of registering a brand is \$15. At the end of the first year a maintenance fee of \$10 is due and will be due every five years thereafter.

9. The Brand Registry is maintained by the State Commissioner of Agriculture. Correspondence should be sent to:

Brand Registry Section  
Veterinary Division  
Missouri Department of Agriculture  
P. O. Box 630  
Jefferson City, Mo. 65101

Application forms for brand registration are available by writing the above, University of Missouri Extension Centers, or Missouri Cattlemen's Association, Ashland, Mo. 65010. The cattleman's association will assist in selection of brands and other branding problems.





## Branding equipment

Good, properly designed equipment is essential for a good job of branding. Ranchers who brand with hot irons have two alternatives: (1) individual irons with separate heating source, and (2) electric branding iron with heating element in the branding surface.

Iron, steel, and stainless steel are the most popular materials for branding irons. Copper is satisfactory although it more easily burns up in the heating process. Length of the handle of the iron varies with personal preference. Most people prefer a 30- to 38-inch handle. The face of the iron that contacts the skin should be  $\frac{1}{4}$ - to  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch wide; a  $\frac{3}{8}$ - to  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch face is usually preferred. The narrower-faced, light-weight iron is usually preferred for horses. At the junction of two pieces of metal, such as an upright joining the cross bar in a "T," there should be a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch gap in the face of the iron to eliminate concentration of heat.

Sizes of letter or figures preferred usually are 3 inches for calves and 4 or 5 inches for mature cattle.

Popular sources of heat for branding irons include butane and wood. Wood fire is used satisfactorily by many cattlemen, but butane is popular because it is convenient and easily controlled. Coal fires, particularly with blowers, are not recommended because they readily burn the irons.

Good restraining equipment that gives accessibility to the brand location is highly desirable. Such equipment for handling calves may not be necessary.

Clipping the hair at the brand site prior to branding may make brands clearer, although this is not always necessary. Most experienced branders do not need to clip the hair to get good brands.

When using the electric branding iron, be sure the voltage at the branding iron is satisfactory. Inadequate wire size, either in the lead-in from the transformer or the extension cords, will result in improper heating and a poor brand.

## Branding tips

The objective of a good brand is a well-defined scar from which no hair will grow. This is accomplished by burning only the outer layer of skin. A properly

burned brand is easily read when hair is clipped from the brand location.

Proper equipment and technique, plus experience, help in getting good brands on cattle.

1. Before you start to brand, make sure your irons are clean and free of rust or charred material. Keep the irons clean as you brand. A wire brush works well. The best care is to clean your irons thoroughly after use and oil them lightly. Some people store the irons in a bucket of oil.

2. The irons should be heated until they are an ash-gray color. There is probably a tendency to overheat an iron rather than to underheat one.

3. If you are branding without clipping and the hair bursts into flame, the iron is too hot.

4. Remember, only burn through the hair, and then burn the first layer of skin.

5. The animal must be well-restrained so the iron does not slip, which would result in a splotched, illegible brand.

6. Experience will show you the proper length of application to the animal. As a start, try for a 3-to-5-second application.

7. When the branding iron is removed from the animal, the branded area should appear as a saddle-leather color.

8. Branding cattle when the hair is wet or if animals have been recently treated with an oil base material, such as a pour-on insecticide, will not give clear, legible brands.

9. When applying a branding iron to the animal, use a rocking motion with the iron firmly against the animal. This will result in a better brand with a more even distribution of heat to the skin.

## Selecting your brand

Simple designs are the easiest to construct and probably easiest to read. Sharp angles, small circles (such as you get with a "B") should be avoided. They create a concentration of heat resulting in smeary, blotchy brands. This may be partially overcome by thinning the iron or cutting a groove at these "extra hot points."