

Branding Practices in Beef Cow/Calf Herds

Beef Cow/Calf Health and Productivity Audit

Hot iron branding cattle as a form of owner identification was first recorded in Egyptian tombs in 2700 B.C. The first recorded brands in the Western Hemisphere were the Three Latin Crosses of Hernán Cortéz who landed in Mexico in 1519. Branding continues to be a common form of permanent cattle identification and is advocated as a theft deterrent. A 1992-93 study by the National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) found that **12.2 percent of U.S. beef cow/calf producers brand calves prior to weaning. This accounted for 37.6 percent of all calves born.**

Branding practices have recently been scrutinized for the hide damage they cause. The damage decreases the quantity of hide that can be used for leather goods. In an effort to help define the beef industry's branding practices, NAHMS included pertinent questions in its Beef Cow/Calf Health and Productivity Audit (CHAPA). The questions were asked of 3,397 producers from operations throughout the lower 48 U.S. states. Respondents were randomly selected so that the results would represent all U.S. beef cow/calf producers. Two objectives of the study were to help quantify the number of U.S. operations branding calves and identify the primary branding sites used for calves.

The number of producers branding and the number of calves being branded prior to weaning vary considerably by region, as do branding laws that regulate the practice. As shown in Figure 1, branding is more prevalent in the Western portion of the country where common grazing is more widespread. The Southwest has the highest proportion of operations that brand (nearly 61 percent). These operations account for about 92 percent of all unweaned calves in the region. Producers who brand tend to brand nearly all of their unweaned calves. Branding

Figure 1

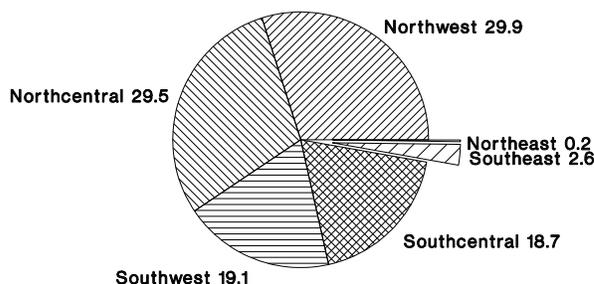


sites on steers and heifers and the percent of those branded prior to weaning were similar on U.S. operations.

Figure 2 shows the regional origin of U.S. unweaned calves that were branded. **The largest percentage of branded calves originated from the Northwest and Northcentral regions, 29.9 and 29.4 percent respectively.**

Figure 2

Origin of All U.S. Branded Calves by Region



Hides are classified by brand site for marketing purposes, due to damage caused by the brand. Brand sites are shown in Figure 3. In the last 5 years, hides branded on the side/rib (B) have brought average prices of 16 percent less than unbranded hides, and shoulder or hip-branded (A, C and D) hides brought 11 percent less. These discounts translated to an average of \$13 and \$9 per hide respectively. Brand location is legislated by laws in some areas or is the producer's choice in others.

CHAPA results indicate that, of the 12.2 percent of U.S. operations that brand, the most common site used is the upper hip (6.0 percent of the total operations). The percentage of calves branded on the upper hip was 17.1 percent. The next most common sites were the side/rib, shoulder, and lower hip. Less than 1 percent of the animals were branded on the rump, head, or neck.

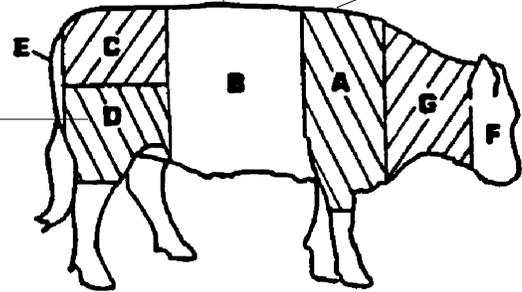
Table 1 shows the percent of U.S. beef calves born in 1992 that were branded prior to weaning by brand location and region. In the Northwest, the calf's side/rib was the most common place for producers to place brands, while in other regions, it was the upper hip. Branding of cattle after weaning was not addressed during the CHAPA.

CHAPA collaborators included the National

Figure 3

Percent of Total U.S. Operations and Animals Branded for Selected Sites*

Operations = 6.0% Operations = 4.2% Operations = 1.1%
Calves = 17.1% Calves = 14.0% Calves = 3.5%



Operations = 1.1%
Calves = 2.6%

Sites:

- A: Shoulder
- B: Side/rib
- C: Upper hip
- D: Lower hip
- E: Rump along tail
- F: Head
- G: Neck

* Total percent of operations branding by site does not equal the total percent of U.S. operations that brand (12.2) because some producers use multiple sites.

Table 1

Percent of U.S. Beef Calves Born in 1992 by Brand Location and Region							Location
	Northwest	Southwest	Northcentral	Southcentral	Northeast	Southeast	Total*
Upper Hip	4.0	3.6	5.3	3.6	0.1	0.5	= 17.1
Side	6.0	2.1	4.1	1.8	0.0	< 0.1	= 14.0
Shoulder	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.7	0.0	0.1	= 3.5
Lower Hip	0.3	0.3	0.9	0.8	0.0	0.3	= 2.6
Other	< 0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.0	< 0.1	= 0.5
Total percent of U.S. calves that are branded:							37.6

*Column does not total due to rounding.

Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA), State and Federal Veterinary Medical Officers, and the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (USDA:APHIS:VS).

Other CHAPA information is available on the following topics: Branding, Injection sites, Identification methods, Facilities, Calf health, and Reproductive

efficiency. For more information, contact:

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