



Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC)

“Serving Texas Animal Agriculture Since 1893”

New Cattle Traceability Rule

What you need to know

Q: What age/class of cattle must have acceptable permanent identification?

A: Sexually intact adult beef cattle 18 months and older and Mexican origin event cattle of any age. Nursing calves, steers, spayed heifers, bulls and heifers under 18 months are exempt (unless heifer has calved). Dairy cattle have been under more stringent identification requirements since 2008.

Q: Do I need to tag all of my cattle?

A: No. Only the classes of cattle mentioned above changing ownership will need to be tagged.

Q: Where can I find the complete listing of all Commission approved permanent identification devices?

A: Producers may access the complete list at www.tahc.state.tx.us or by contacting any TAHC office or personnel.

Q: Do I have to use the free eartags offered, or can I use other acceptable methods of identification?

A: No. The free metal tags are not required to be used, but they are one low cost option.

Q: Will ear tag pliers be provided at no cost or will I have to purchase them?

A: A limited supply of eartag pliers is available at no cost. Because of the limited supply, producers are also encouraged to consider purchasing tagging pliers from any Ag supply outlets. Many participating Tag Distributors have metal ear tag pliers available on a check-out basis.

Q: What happens after January 1, 2013 if a sexually intact adult beef cow and/or bull arrives at the sale barn without one form of the acceptable official ID?

A: Identification is required at change of ownership, regardless of where the change happens. The TAHC recommends that owners contact their local sale barn before hauling their cattle to determine available options for handling cattle not already tagged at that facility. Some markets are conducting voluntarily brucellosis testing of cattle as well, and a tag would be applied when the blood sample is taken. Some markets may provide a tagging service, and some may require the animals to have official ID upon arrival. The TAHC may restrict the movement of animals not in compliance with identification requirements. For private treaty sales, producers can contact their private veterinarian for assistance or ensure the animals are properly identified themselves.

Q: If an animal already has a silver test tag, orange vaccination tag, or other official ID device, will it need to have a new tag applied if sold?

A: No. Animals presented for sale with an approved official ID will not have to be retagged.

Q: What do I need to do if one of my cows has lost her orange brucellosis calfhood vaccination tag, but still has the ear tattoo?

A: The calfhood vaccination tag is an acceptable ID but the tattoo alone is not. Owners can have their veterinarian retag an animal with another orange vaccination tag if the animal has a legible tattoo, or the animal

can be retagged with any other acceptable ID device by the owner, vet, or at most markets if it is being sold at one. A calfhood vaccination tattoo alone is not traceable, and is not an acceptable form of identification.

Q: Is my ranch brand that is registered with the county an acceptable form of official ID?

A: No, although registered ranch brands are considered official ID for ownership purposes, they are not considered official ID by the TAHC rule for traceability purposes. Ranch brands are not traceable, because identical brands can be registered in multiple counties in Texas and ranch brands usually do not individually identify each animal.

Q: If selling cattle with a breed association registration tattoo, registration firebrand or registration freeze brand, what information do we need to present to prove they are registered?

A: It is recommended when selling registered cattle to present the animal's registration certificate and/or have their registration number listed on a certificate of veterinary inspection. It is also recommended that owners discuss this issue with the local TAHC inspectors and market management in advance if the cattle are to be sold at a market with this ID type.

Q: Are buffalo (bison) subject to this rule?

A: Yes, bison must meet the same ID requirements as cattle.

Q: On which ear should the tag be placed?

A: Although the rule does not specify, care should be taken to ensure that any calfhood vaccination tattoos in female cattle are not covered up when applying a button type RFID tag. Vaccination tattoos are found in the middle section of the right ear.

Q: Are custom tags acceptable?

A: Yes, if they meet certain criteria. Acceptable custom tags are those commercially produced with the ranch name and an individual animal number printed or embossed on them at the factory. It is recommended that owners discuss this issue with the local TAHC inspectors and market management in advance if the cattle are to be sold at a market with this ID type.

Q: What about official ID for other species? I no longer have sheep, but still have scrapie tags and applicator. Can I use my Scrapie tags on my cattle?

A: No. Scrapie tags are designed for the smaller, thinner ears of sheep and goats, and should only be used in those species.

Q: What if an owner that has been assigned tags moves? Do they need to report it and if so, to whom?

A: Metal tags are assigned to an individual and not necessarily linked to a location. Owners may call the TAHC to update their contact information, but this is not a requirement. Texas tags should not be applied to cattle located in other states.

Q: If more than one person has cattle on one farm, does each individual need their own tags or just tags for the farm location?

A: Traceability is more reliable if each owner uses their own assigned

tags. It is recommended that owner specific records be kept if animals are identified with shared tags.

Q: When does change of ownership “legally” occur?

A: Change of ownership at a market occurs when the auctioneer indicates a buyer. For private treaty sales it occurs when the animal changes hands.

Q: If a producer from another state sells their cattle in Texas, should tag distributors issue tags to them?

A: Texas tags should not be issued to a producer in another state. Sexually intact beef cattle 18 months and older must have official identification to enter Texas, as do Mexico origin event cattle and dairy cattle of any age.

Q: Why are sexually intact adult animals the only ones that need to be tagged?

A: Some other classes of cattle must be officially identified, as described in the previous question. However, identification requirements are focused on breeding animals because they have a longer production life and tend to move between operations more than feeder animals.

Q: Is this rule a federal rule?

A: No, this is a Texas rule, but it will put the beef industry in compliance with the anticipated USDA Animal Disease Traceability rule for interstate movement when released.

Q: When does this Texas rule go into effect?

A: The rule goes into effect January 1, 2013. The TAHC has been working since the rule was passed in the summer of 2012 to ensure that the cattle industry understands and is prepared for the change.

Q: Do I need to keep records of individual identification when I sell my animal(s)?

A: While keeping records is not required when animals are sold as part of a livestock breeding or production operation, producers are strongly encouraged to do so. Dealers are required to keep records, including individual animal identification, as part of a separate rule.

Q: Who is responsible for maintaining the information related to eartag distribution?

A: All metal tag numbers assigned will be maintained in a TAHC-managed database. The TAHC does not track individual change of ownership transactions.

Q: What is the legal obligation of the livestock market in the mandatory ID program?

A: A change of ownership is a transaction between a seller and a buyer, and the seller is responsible for assuring his animals have official identification. The market however can be considered as an agent representing the seller. Animals that do not meet the identification requirement can be restricted from being moved and therefore held at the market.

Q: If a trace back occurs, can the TAHC require a market to release its sales records? What if there are no records of individual identification?

A: TAHC rules require markets to keep certain records for a minimum of five years, and to make the records available for inspection by TAHC representatives. One of the requirements is to keep records of individual animal identification numbers of animals sold. The TAHC anticipates market operators will voluntarily keep records correlating eartags and backtags on their own accord, to provide the best service to their customers.

Q: Can I move my cattle directly to slaughter from my farm or ranch without an ID?

A: Yes, ranchers can move an animal from their premise directly to slaughter without an ID because these animals can be traced through

plant records. Breeding cattle otherwise changing ownership by private treaty sales, through a market or video auction must have acceptable permanent identification.

Q: What happens if my cattle are too weak to be safely tagged at market?

A: The Commission proposed an amendment at the September 2012 meeting that would allow some flexibility in application of the rule. If the amendment passes as proposed, a TAHC inspector in consultation with market ownership or management may exempt beef cattle at a market if the animal’s physical condition makes the handling required to apply permanent identification unsafe or injurious in nature. Exempt cattle must be sold and consigned to an approved slaughter facility, and movement may be permitted by the TAHC.

Q: Who has violated the rule if a non-slaughter buyer takes possession of an exempt (untagged) animal?

A: The seller is technically in violation of the rule, but if a buyer or the livestock market is knowingly violating the requirement then the TAHC can take compliance action on them if necessary.

Q: Can the auctioneer refuse to accept a higher bid on an exempted animal if he doesn’t know whether the bidder is buying for slaughter?

A: This process is similar to the sale of bulls not tested for Trichomoniasis. Accepting the bid is the personal choice/discretion of the auctioneer. TAHC inspectors will help enforce the identification rule at the time of sale when possible.

Q: If an exempted animal is sold to a non-slaughter buyer, who is responsible for stopping them from paying for and taking the animal?

A: The seller is responsible for assuring his animals are properly identified. However, if a buyer or a livestock market knowingly takes action that facilitates violation of the requirement, the TAHC can take compliance action on all appropriate parties.

For additional ear tag information, including the nearest distributor of free USDA tags, contact the TAHC Traceability Team at 1-800-550-8242 ext. 733, visit www.tahc.state.tx.us or contact your local region office.



- Region 1 - Amarillo**
806-354-9335
- Region 2 - Hempstead**
979-921-9481
- Region 3 - Fort Worth**
817-244-2597
- Region 4 - Mt. Pleasant**
903-572-1966
- Region 5 - Beeville**
361-358-3234
- Region 6 - Lampasas**
512-556-6277
- Region 7 - Rockdale**
512-446-2507

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