



# Ag News

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## LMA: Cattle Industry Groups Develop Cattle Disease Traceability ID System *Source: CattleNetwork.com*

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Believing that the discussion of a national animal identification plan had moved away from those most affected by it – cattle producers and marketers – eight cattle industry organizations have agreed on a statement of 12 principles, in the development of a cattle disease traceability identification system. The organizations, representing the beef, dairy and marketing sectors, developed the statement of principles during a meeting in Kansas City, Mo., last November.

The meeting was organized by Livestock Marketing Association, in cooperation with its cattle industry partners, to work toward a common understanding and approach to enhancing current cattle identification (ID) and traceability systems for animal disease surveillance and control in the United States.

The organizations agreed that an ID plan for the cattle industry should be specie-specific because of the diverse way cattle are raised, marketed and processed. The plan was presented Dec. 18 to U.S. Department of Agriculture Undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Edward Avalos, and other agency officials and transmitted to members of Congress recently.

Nancy Robinson, LMA vice president for government and industry affairs, said the discussion of what is “a practical, workable, cost-effective plan for cattle disease ID traceability has largely moved from the cattle production and marketing sectors. “Those responsible for the production and marketing of cattle have long understood the importance and value of ID for cattle disease surveillance, control and eradication purposes,” she said. “Building upon that, we agreed upon principles that should form the basis of a workable, national cattle disease ID plan.”

### *Highlights of the 12 principles:*

- Additional costs to the beef and dairy industry

must be minimized.

- Cattle ID information must be kept confidential and should be kept under the control of state animal health officials. The only data required to be collected should be that necessary only for cattle disease surveillance, control and eradication.

- There should be renewed emphasis on preventing the introduction of foreign animal diseases.

- The 48-hour foot and mouth disease traceback model is currently unachievable.

- The ID system should operate at the speed of commerce.

- An interstate movement ID program should use as a model the brucellosis/tuberculosis (TB) surveillance and control programs.

- Any ID enhancements of historically established federal and state cattle disease ID programs – beginning with the individual identification of adult breeding cattle – should be modeled after the TB and brucellosis programs, as they existed prior to USDA’s National Animal ID System modifications, and voluntarily phased-in over a proper time frame.

- Producers should be protected from liability for the acts of others after the cattle have left the producer’s control.

- State animal health officials should continue to have their historical flexibility and discretion in assigning an identifier for the person responsible for the livestock, such as in an epidemiological

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investigation or mitigation of a disease outbreak.

- Producers should have the flexibility to use currently established and/or evolving methods of official identification.

In transmitting the statement of principles to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack and members of Congress, the organizations said while they “realized much work remains to be done within our individual organizations, as well as the wider cattle industry, we believe the attached statement of general principles...represents a significant step forward on a challenging issue for all of us.”

Signing the statement of the 12 principles were, in addition to LMA, the American Angus Association, American Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, R-CALF USA, Texas Cattle Feeders Association and the U.S. Cattlemen’s Association. The complete 12 principles can be found on the home page of LMA’s website, [www.lmaweb.com](http://www.lmaweb.com).

## Tips To Protect Your Cattle & Property

by Robert Wells and Clay Wright, Noble Foundation

Cattle rustling can conjure up different thoughts depending on who you are. Some imagine a scene from an old western where bandana-wearing cowboys gather up a herd of cows and drive them to a distant and secret location. Others might think this is something from the past and doesn't happen now. Unfortunately, cattle rustling is still a serious issue.

Recently, there have been increasing reports of cattle rustling across the country. It seems that when the economy gets tough, crime rates increase. Unfortunately, ranchers are not immune to crime. In many cases, those who live in the country are targeted because criminals know there are fewer people to watch for suspicious activity. As a farm or ranch owner, you must be observant to protect your property from those who would steal it from you. Here are a few tips to reduce the potential of becoming a victim of theft.

- Permanently identify your cows. A cow that has some form of brand is not attractive to a potential thief. Make sure your brand is registered in the state or county your ranch is in and make sure that local law enforcement authorities know your brand.
- Don't feed at the gate or in your pens. Don't get your cows used to being fed near the pasture gate or in the working pens. This only trains the cows to come to a place where it is easier for a criminal to catch them.
- Lock your gates. Criminals are inherently lazy. If they have to work very hard, they'll move on to an easier target. Additionally, a locked gate will slow down a thief; they want to be able to move quickly into and out of an area. Don't give out combinations or keys to your locks.
- Don't locate working pens near pasture entrances. I call these "thieving pens." If your cows are accustomed to

coming to a horn or siren and being fed in the working pens, you have made a thief's job much easier.

- Feed or check cows at different times of the day. Don't get into a set pattern that will make it easy for a crook to know when you will be around. Make sure you have an accurate head count each time you go out.
- Be vigilant. If you see a suspicious vehicle on your county road that you have not seen before, take time to write down their license plate number. Or, better yet, stop and chat with the driver. A thief is less likely to steal cattle in the area if he knows people can describe him.
- Cattle are not the only things that can be stolen. Other popular items are tractors, trailers, saddles, horses and farm equipment. Here are a few tips to reduce the potential for theft of these items.
- Park trailers and equipment out of view from the road and take your keys.
- Lock saddle compartments on trailers and tack/equipment rooms.
- Photograph and brand your horses. A photo can help investigators locate your horse more quickly. Horses that are branded are easily identifiable and less likely to be stolen.
- Put identifying marks such as a registered brand or driver's license number on valuable equipment and saddles. Photograph those items and the markings.
- Record serial and model numbers,, as well as other distinguishing characteristics of equipment. This will not prevent theft, but can make recovery easier.
- Put padlocks on and lower the tongue of a trailer so that it has to be raised before connecting to it. This will slow down a thief and make it less attractive.

In general, most thieves are opportunists. If we do a few things to slow them down, make it harder on them or readily identify items of interest, they will move on down the road. You work hard for your assets; don't let them become someone else's.



## Is Stocking Rate So Important?

by R. Dwayne Rice, Rangeland Management Specialist (NRCS)

Selecting the correct stocking rate for a pasture may be the most difficult, but also the most important, decision a manager can make. The problem would be greatly simplified if forage yields from pastures were the same year after year or fluctuated only between narrow limits. It is this unpredictability of forage yield that causes the difficulty. Hitting the magic 50 percent use of annual forage production is the goal, but what happens when the degree of use is consistently above 50 percent for 3-5 years? We know that plant responses to grazing are conditioned by past history, as well as environmental conditions; however, at the end of the season, it is stocking rate that will ultimately determine the potential forage production for several years into the future. This year's stocking rate, the choice of the manager, will directly affect next year's forage production, plant community, livestock production, and economic return from the pasture.

### *How much can the stocking rate affect forage production?*

A number of research studies across the country have been conducted to measure the effects of stocking rate on forage production. Several of these studies have been conducted in the Kansas Flint Hills, where drought is not much of a concern, and near Hays, where precipitation is more variable. The results from these studies, regardless of where or when they were conducted, are remarkably similar. After 3-5 years, heavy grazing (the annual removal of 60 percent or more of the production of the primary forage species) resulted in less forage production in the pasture the following year compared to a moderately grazed pasture (the annual removal of 40-50 percent of the production of the primary forage species). Over a 25 year period, repeated heavy grazing resulted in a 20 percent decline in forage production while moderate grazing had no effect on forage production potential. It is important to note the difference between heavy grazing and moderate grazing is a mere 10 percent greater degree of use of the primary forage plants within the plant community. As would be expected due to selectivity of cattle, the most important productive and preferred forage species are the first to decline in production and number.

### *Why does this reduction in the primary forage species occur?*

Heavy grazing affects more than just the defoliation of the primary forage plants. The effects of heavy grazing manifest themselves over time, reducing the amount of mulch and increasing the amount of bare ground exposed to direct sunlight. Ground cover, or mulch, has a moderating effect on soil moisture and temperature. Soil organisms are most active and efficient when the soil is moist and the temperature is between 86 and 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Soil exposed to direct sunlight is hotter than ambient air temperature and can reach levels lethal to these organisms. As the number of soil organisms is depleted or their activity slows, so does the availability of nutrients, the second most important limiting factor to forage production on rangelands.

Soil moisture, which is the most important limiting factor to forage production, is also affected by grazing intensity. Adequate mulch levels increase the rate of rainfall infiltration. One study conducted at Hays, Kansas, by J.L. Launchbaugh, showed infiltration rates of 0.73 and 1.19



inches per hour for heavy and moderate grazing systems, respectively. Run-off also increases as the amount of bare ground increases. The impact of a raindrop on bare soil looks like a micro-bomb, dislodging fine soil particles that seal the surface of the soil, resulting in less infiltration and moisture available to plants for forage production during the growing season. Mulch is a critical component in minimizing evaporation, moderating soil temperatures, and getting precipitation through the soil surface and into the soil profile where it is available for plant growth. Removing more than 50 percent of the annual production of the primary forage species reduces the amount of mulch available to protect the soil surface.

### *How does a reduction in forage quantity affect animal performance and the potential for economic return?*

Both forage quality and quantity are factors in individual and per acre animal performance. Average individual animal gains of steers over a 7 year study at Hays, Kansas, by Launchbaugh, using high, moderate, and light stocking rates was 122, 188, and 217 pounds of gain per steer, respectively, during the summer grazing period. As would be expected, animal gain per acre was highest under the high stocking rate at 61 pounds of gain per acre while moderate stocking showed gains of 55 pounds per acre and light stocking produced 43 pounds of gain per acre. The bigger point to be made was the rate of gain was not sustainable: within 3-5 years there were significant changes in the plant community and the amount of bare ground increased resulting in less forage production and forage availability in the heavy stocked pastures. The heavily grazed pastures also had higher annual fluctuations in forage production during the study.



Another study, conducted by Jim Gerrish in Missouri, measured the nutrient quality of the available forage at heavy, moderate, and light stocking rates. Nutrient density per pound of forage consumed was highest in the heavily stocked pastures due to young plant material having a higher nutrient density than older plant material. However, the gains per individual animal were once again lowest in the heavily stocked pastures and highest in the lightly stocked pastures. Gerrish attributed the poor individual animal performance of the heavily stocked pastures to the lack of forage quantity rather than quality. The amount of forage available to the grazing animal was inadequate to meet their requirements for body maintenance and growth. Conversely, forage quantity was not limited in the lightly stocked pastures, and the animals through selective grazing could meet their requirements for maintenance and optimum gain. The moderately stocked pastures produced individual animal gains higher than the high stocking rate pastures and had higher gains per acre than the low stocking rate pastures. Gerrish concluded that moderate stocking rates produced the best combination of forage quality and quantity for individual animal performance and gains per acre, making the moderate stocking rate the best for sustained economic returns to the manager.

### *How do we know when pastures are being moderately grazed?*

What gets measured gets managed, so begin by measuring how

much is grown, how much is grazed, and how much is left. Stocking rates are unique to each individual pasture so there is not a standard average for a particular county or area. A couple of well-placed grazing exclusion cages, a yard stick, and a camera are all that are needed to determine the degree of use within a pasture. Designing and implementing an annual monitoring plan to measure and record forage production and degree of utilization within a specific pasture is crucial to maintaining adequate mulch levels, healthy belowground root systems and microbial populations, forage production, and animal performance. With measured information, managers can make timely adjustments in stocking rate decisions that will maintain productive native rangelands well into the future. If you would like assistance in monitoring your pastures, contact your local NRCS office.

### Cattle Breeding: Score Them Now

*Source: Dr. Rick Rasby, Professor of Animal Science, University of Nebraska*

We have visited about this topic a number of times and its importance to cow performance. Body condition at calving, especially for spring-calving cows, not only impacts how cows perform at calving, but also influences performance during the next breeding season. How cows perform during the breeding season impacts profit potential in the cow/calf enterprise in regards to pregnancy rate and when in the breeding season they become pregnant. Cows that become pregnant early in the breeding season, calve early in the calving season, and their calves are older and heavier at weaning. Over conditioned cows, especially if the extra condition was fed on, is wasting money. Under conditioned cows are risky because their performance can be very inconsistent. Proper conditioned cows are the goal. It's like Goldilocks and the porridge being to hot, to cold, or just right.

Let's refresh the condition scoring system. The most common system used is the one to nine condition scoring system. A condition score one cow is very thin and emaciated. A condition score 9 cow is very fat and obese. Very seldom do we see the extreme body condition scores. Most cows are between a condition score 3 and 7.

There are 6 areas on the animal that we visually assess the amount of condition (fat): the brisket, ribs, back, hooks (hip area), pins, and tailhead area. A condition score three cow will have no fat in the brisket, over the ribs and back, or in the hooks, pins, and tailhead area. In fact, she will have a crease in her hind quarter where she has had to start to mobilize muscle tissue to meet maintenance energy needs. The condition score three cow, as she is viewed from the rear, appears pointed because you can easily see her spinous process, hip and pin bones. A condition score five cow will have a "smoother" appearance because she has fat in the areas described previously. You can not see the fore-ribs, but can see the 12th and 13th ribs in a condition score five cow. A condition score six cow will have fat in the brisket, you will not see the 12th or 13th ribs, and there will be two small ponds of fat on both sides of the tailhead. Sometime inexperienced condition scorers will catch cows in the chute and hand palpate them to train the touch to a visually image. It is critical that when condition scoring cows that evaluate condition and not muscle or hair. "Seeing" through the hair can be

difficult in the winter.

Cow body condition is a much better gage of your nutrition program as compared to cow weight. When you observe cows daily, it is more difficult to detect changes in condition score. Many times before you realize a change in condition, cows have actually lost more condition than you would like. Producers need to be disciplined to make sure they are not underestimating condition changes so that appropriate action can be taken. If you would like to have new ranch-hands learn about condition scoring beef cows or brush-up on this tool, go through our learning modules [Body Condition Scoring Your Beef Cow Herd](#), [A Guide to Condition Scoring Beef Cows](#), and [Using Body Condition Score to Manage the Nutritional Program](#).

For spring-calving cows, manage cows to calve in a condition score 5. For first-calf-heifers, manage them to calve in a condition score 6. The extra condition is warranted for the young females because they are still growing, lactating for the first time, and trying to get ready for their next pregnancy. Even if you do everything right with these females, their postpartum interval is at least 15 days longer compared to a mature cow.

Cows will gain and lose condition throughout the year. If they are doing a good job of raising their calf, they will likely be thin at weaning. In drought conditions, cows raising a calf will be thin. In most conditions, thin cows should bounce back in condition 45 to 60 days after weaning. If mature cows are always thin and need you to feed them to get them back in condition before calving, check the genetics. Something doesn't match up with the feed resources. Cow size and milk production are the biggest challenges from a nutritional standpoint. May be one or both of these characteristics don't match your feed resources.

Condition scoring cows at weaning seems logical. Pay particular attention to young females weaning their first calf, they are the ones that are likely to be thin. Don't separate them off yet, watch them to make sure they begin to regain condition after the nutrient demand for lactation has been removed. Mature cows that are thin at weaning should bounce back in condition if they are thin at weaning by 60 days post-weaning. These are what I term "elastic" cows, they are thin at weaning but then, like a rubber band when stretched and the stress relieved, return to an acceptable condition once the calf is weaned. Condition score spring-calving cows again about 90 days prior to calving. This is your last opportunity to get cows in the right condition before calving. Trying to add condition to cows after calving is like trying to push water uphill. The diet will need to be fairly dense in energy and cows that get high energy diets after calving, tend to milk more and calves seem to get milk scours.

If you need to feed thin cows prior to calving to get them back into condition, in the 1996 Nutrient Requirements for Beef Cattle there is a table that, based on cow weight and condition score, has the energy required to move a cow from a lower body condition to the next highest condition. In the learning module URL given above, there is another learning module titled "Using Body Condition Score to Manage the Nutrition Program". You can learn how to use the 1996 NRC table and there is an example of designing a diet.

**UPCOMING EVENTS**  
***More info coming soon***

**2/5** Jack County Wildlife Management Association meeting – *Jacksboro*

**2/9** Prescribed Burn Workshop (Part 1) – *Jacksboro*

**2/16** Prescribed Burn Workshop (Part 2) – *Jacksboro*

**2/19-2/20** Texoma Farm & Ranch Show – *Wichita Falls*

**3/24** Hay, Beef, & Forage Day - *Graham*

***Plan on attending these educational programs!***