



BRANDING OF CATTLE

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Branding is one of the chores that most cattle breeders dread. This need not be the case. I find that I look forward to the branding day as it is a challenge and once done properly and neatly, it will be a long-lasting work of art. A good brand on a good animal is going to be seen by a lot of people for a long time! A bad brand will be an embarrassment.

Equipment required:

There are various models and makes of branding irons. My personal preference is 3-inch stainless steel irons. Most sets make use of a gas burner.

Sets where all the irons can be heated simultaneously are ideal as this saves time.

Facilities:

Good facilities where the animal stands level and square, with at least a neck clamp are essential. A body clamp is advisable. Some breeders use immobilisers. This can help, but I find the animal sometimes bunches up, which results in a sloping brand. (See photo below)

Technique:

- Clean all debris off the branding irons. A wire brush works well
- Wipe all the dirt / dung off of the area to be branded
- Heat the irons till they are very hot - red hot is ideal!
- Start with the middle letter of the brand ie: the 0 in LEB 900 4, taking care to place it centrally and level. (See photo above)
- Apply mild pressure for a split second (to be able to remove quickly when the animal kicks)
- Re-apply with moderate pressure for 2 - 3 seconds till the skin colour of the brand turns light brown

- Repeat for each letter, being careful of spacing and levels
- Once complete, loosen the animal gently and let it out of the crush slowly

The most common cause of smudging is using an iron which is not hot enough. This forces the brander to apply pressure on the brand for a longer period which results in general heating up of a larger skin area.

The hotter the iron, the more intense and localised the heat. This results in a sharp clear brand. After 2 - 3 weeks the scab will fall off. This looks ugly for a few weeks, so consider this when branding for a sale or inspection. Either brand within a week of the event so that the scab has not yet formed, or at least 6 weeks before to allow for full healing.

I prefer to brand at approximately 1 year of age, reasons being:

- a) Skin area is big enough for good spacing
- b) Skin is not as delicate as at weaning age
- c) The animal is almost grown, so the brand does not grow larger with the animal as would be the case with a weaner.

Your brand is unique - Do it well - and be proud of it!

