

## **The Importance of Branding**

I thought you might enjoy an article written by E.A. Turco on the importance of branding your livestock. Cpl. Ed Turco is a 22+ year member of the RCMP. Ed has 12 years of rural crime work including 6 years of serious crime experience and for the past 4 years has been in the RCMP Livestock Section. Ed enjoys team roping, reining and driving his daughters to horse shows.

## **Branding Livestock**

Ever try describing your horse to a stranger or a police officer with enough clarity it could be identified. Hopefully you never have the experience as it's almost impossible. Between 50 to 75 horses are stolen each year in Alberta and the main reason is these animals are not branded.

RCMP Livestock Section recommends horse owners obtain a registered brand and freeze brand their horses. Hot branding is a well established method of permanently marking livestock but is not as obvious as a freeze brand. Brands can be obtained in Alberta from Livestock Identification Services, in Saskatchewan at Saskatchewan Agriculture Livestock Branch and British Columbia residents at Ownership Identification Inc. The cost of a brand is a small fee to pay for the security it provides.

I have investigated stolen horse complaints where the stolen horse had been branded and once the thief observed the horse in the light of day and noticed the brand he turned the horse loose. The experienced thief knows the freeze branded horse is easily recognized. Anything short of locking him up inside a barn would mean someone would spot him and notify the authorities. One must realize a freeze branded horse can be identified from a half mile away with a good pair of binoculars and from a vehicle driving past at eighty kilometers if the animal is along the road.

There is the added security that all livestock sold at public auctions, going into feedlots and packing plants or transported out of province are inspected by brand inspectors. If the horse has been reported stolen and is branded the brand inspectors will identify it as stolen and seize the horse prior to the horse being offered for sale.

A lot of horse owners do not realize the protection that is afforded to them when a horse is branded with a registered brand. Every time the horse is brand inspected and the person who has possession of the horse is not the registered brand owner that person must produce bills of sale proving ownership back to the registered brand owner. The brand inspector's computer data base is also queried to determine if the brand in questioned has been reported as being on a horse that was stolen. There have been incidents where the horse was recovered by brand inspectors before the owner became aware it was stolen. Also when the horse is identifiable by a brand a permanent record is kept by the brand inspector thus, creating a permanent record. Between a computer data base listing all stolen brands and permanent records this is a serious problem for the thief.

Lets take a look at two separate incidents of horse theft that occurred in Alberta over the last year. One is the theft of two well broke saddle horses from the Brooks area and the second is a mare and foal from the Ft. MacLeod area. Both were investigated by the RCMP with the assistance of Livestock Identification Services brand inspectors.

The first is a theft of two unbranded well broke geldings from Lakeside Feedlot located near Brooks, Alberta which is approximately two hours east of Calgary. The two horses were stolen from their stalls over the weekend. Brooks RCMP Det. with the assistance of other police services have conducted an extensive investigation with enquiries made as far away as Ontario.

The owners have published photographs in Horse and Livestock Industry magazines, placed poster all over Alberta and alerted brand inspectors in Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Unfortunately the horses have not been located and the trail grows colder everyday.

The second example is a branded mare and foal from the Ft. MacLeod area which is approximately two hours south of Calgary. A mare and foal was brought into an inspected feedlot near Ft. MacLeod. As the mare was branded and the seller not the registered owner of the brand the seller had to provide documentation proving ownership. Documentation was provided although questionable in nature. The brand inspector being diligent contacted the registered owner of the brand by simply looking the owner up in the brand book. The owner was questioned about the sale of the mare. Not only did he not sell the mare he didn't even know she was missing. A mare and foal was recovered even before the owner realized they had been stolen.

During many of my presentations, electronic identification is surfaced and my opinion is requested. One must realize the brand is not applied to enable the owner in identifying the horse it is applied so everyone else can identify the animal. If a branded horse is stolen a fan out bulletin is possible as people have something specific to look for. An electronic implant is not visible to the naked eye and even with the scanner one must have close access to the animal. I explain the ultimate safeguard would be a freeze branded horse with the electronic implant. The brand makes it possible to find the stolen animal and the implant would assist in the identification saving the owner the trouble of traveling to where the animal is located.

Livestock owners must be aware that all brands applied to livestock must be registered with the appropriate service responsible for the inspection in your respective province. It is illegal to design and apply a brand without properly registering it.

For more information on Livestock Identification in Alberta contact Livestock Identification Services (403) 509-2088 or <http://www.lis-alberta.com>.