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## Four Ear Tags Evaluated

L. R. Sprott and L. R. Corah

### Summary

Four types of ear tags were evaluated for retention over 2 years. Retention was low for one type, and high for the other three types.

### Introduction

Individual identification in beef herds is essential for efficient record keeping. Hot iron brands, freeze brands and ear tattoos are the only permanent identification, but they are hard to read. Most producers prefer large, easy-to-read tags that remain in the animals' ears at least 2 years.

We studied retention of four types of tags for a 2 year period.

### Procedure

Beef replacement heifers from several trials at Kansas State University were held in a drylot over a 2 year period. Upon arrival, 100 head were identified with a Taylored<sup>1</sup> tag in the right ear and a Temple<sup>2</sup> tag in the left. Eighty-five head were identified with an Allflex<sup>3</sup> tag in the right ear and a Ritchey<sup>4</sup> tag in the left. All tags were the "jumbo" or "maxi" size.

### Results and Discussion

Table .1 shows that only 65% ( $P < .05$ ) of the Taylored tags were still in place after one month. Taylored tags were lost throughout the trial, but losses in the other three were minimal. Temple and Allflex tags tended to remain in the ear longer than Ritchey tags. Taylored tags, those with highest losses, were the easiest to read, especially in winter, because they hung below the base of the ear, out of the hair. Losses may have stemmed from that design. Their design has since been changed.

<sup>1</sup>Taylored Tags Inc.; Taylor, Nebraska

<sup>2</sup>Temple Tag. Co.; Temple, Texas

<sup>3</sup>Allflex Tag Co.; Santa Monica, California

<sup>4</sup>Ritchey Mfg. Co.; Brighton, Colorado

Table 15.1. Percent tags retained over time.

|                              | Tags            |                  |                  |                  |
|------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                              | Taylor          | Alflex           | Ritchey          | Temple           |
| No. of Animals               | 100             | 85               | 85               | 100              |
| Percent tags retained after: |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| Months indicated             |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| 1                            | 65 <sup>a</sup> | 100 <sup>b</sup> | 100 <sup>b</sup> | 100 <sup>b</sup> |
| 3                            | 46 <sup>a</sup> | 100 <sup>b</sup> | 100 <sup>b</sup> | 99 <sup>b</sup>  |
| 5                            | 43 <sup>a</sup> | 98 <sup>b</sup>  | 98 <sup>b</sup>  | 98 <sup>b</sup>  |
| 14                           | 11 <sup>a</sup> | 98 <sup>b</sup>  | 93 <sup>b</sup>  | 98 <sup>b</sup>  |
| 23*                          | 3 <sup>a</sup>  | 96 <sup>bc</sup> | 90 <sup>c</sup>  | 98 <sup>b</sup>  |

\* No. of animals = 76, 59, 59, 76, respectively.

a,b,c Values in same row followed by different superscripts differ significantly (P<.05).

### What to Look for in Ear Tags

Lost ear tags are worthless, so durability and retainability are the chief criteria. How are the tags held in place and how durable they are, especially at their attachment point? How well does the tag fit your record-keeping system? Can you get different colors to identify different groups? Can you specify numbers, or can you apply your own? Will the tag be easy to read? Some tags curl or get covered with hair especially in the winter. No matter how economical or how easy a tag is to apply, if it's lost, or you have to run cattle through a chute to read it, it's a poor investment.