



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/agriculture-livestock-theft-prevention>

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Cattle theft: Not just a thing of the wild west

Madinger explains how producers can protect their livestock from theft

[By Jacob Klaudt](#), K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — In 2025, cattle producers continue receiving record prices for their livestock at local sale barns and auction markets. While many enjoy the spoils of their labor after years of discouraging events like drought and herd reduction, this surge in value beckons unwanted attention.

Scarlett Madinger, the vice president of communications at the Kansas Livestock Association, said producers always hold their cattle and livelihood in high regard. However, current market conditions provide thieves an opportunity to take advantage of those lucrative and unattended livestock.

“Some people see it as an ‘easy way to earn a dollar’ by stealing cattle; they think that they can make a quick turnaround on some dollars,” she said. “Livestock especially at risk are those that are easily accessible.”

With calving season wrapping up, young animals and cow-calf pairs might be more likely to fall victim to theft, depending on what criminals think they can get away with.

The first step in preventing livestock theft involves permanently identifying cattle through techniques like hot brands and ear notches. On the other hand, thieves can easily remove ear tags and other temporary identifiers.

“Branding is the most surefire way to positively identify cattle,” Madinger said. “If someone is trying to sell them at a regional auction market, somebody else is most likely to recognize that brand and know that ‘hey, that isn’t who dropped them off.’”

Another crucial step in warding off theft includes restricting access to pens and pastures by using locks, chains and other security measures.

“Anything that causes someone to take an extra step that's looking to steal cattle serves as a deterrent,” Madinger said.” Especially if you have portable facilities or movable pens, chain those up so they're not easily accessible to somebody looking to back up and load your cattle out.”

Other livestock theft prohibition methods:

- Do not leave cattle penned overnight.
- Be extra vigilant of activity near pens or pastures that sit near high-traffic areas like highways or interstates.
- Check and count cattle frequently, keeping written records, especially if housed in multiple locations.
- Take note of any suspicious or unfamiliar vehicles driving by a property, within reason.

After a suspected crime, Madinger said producers should first contact their local county sheriff's office, then the [Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health](#).

“Call that county sheriff, so that they can come out as quickly as possible and take down any details,” she said. “The division of animal health is the next one because they can send information about stolen livestock to auction markets around the state, so they are aware of them.”

Producers who are members of the [Kansas Livestock Association](#) can report stolen livestock to that organization's office, which will institute a reward program and send out more information about the crime to other members.

While multiple agencies within the state respond to incidents, ranchers should also look outside Kansas for pilfered livestock.

“You're going to want to broaden your search radius for those counties that border Nebraska, Oklahoma or Colorado,” she said. “Your radius depends on your location and how many auction markets are nearby.”

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story

Kansas Department of Agriculture, <https://www.agriculture.ks.gov/public-resources/comments-complaints/stray-stolen-livestock-reports>

Kansas Livestock Association, <https://www.kla.org/programs/theft-reward-program>

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Story by:

Jacob Klaudt, jbklaudt@ksu.edu

More information:

Scarlett Madinger, 785-273-5115, scarlett@kla.org