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## **Cattle Guard Duty**

Cattle prices have been high for months now, and the word is out not just to producers. Individuals with immoral intentions are aware of the high potential for profit. Here are some tips to protect your assets.

The number one prevention step is permanent identification. Techniques like hot brands, well-maintained freeze brands, and ear notches are incredibly useful for vigilant livestock market employees and law enforcement. Temporary methods, such as ear tags, can be easily removed by criminals.

Cattle that are easily accessible from a highway or interstate are at high risk. Use locks on gates and place “No Trespassing” signs in visible areas. Use gate hinges that prevent the gate from being easily removed. According to the vice president of communications at Kansas Livestock Association, “Anything that causes someone to take an extra step that's looking to steal cattle serves as a deterrent. 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.” If possible, install permanent working facilities farther from the main entrance to prevent access by unwanted individuals.

Consider using security or trail cameras to monitor activity. Avoid leaving livestock penned overnight. Check *and count* herds frequently, but do your best to avoid routines. Irregular timing makes it harder to plan a crime. Criminals look for tire tracks and evidence of frequent activity.

Keep an updated herd inventory record and notes on equipment locations. Pictures and videos of your herd may come in handy in case of theft. Images of high value animals with their brand or ear tag clearly visible could aid in recovery investigations. Having landmarks or identifying aspects of your property in the background can also prove ownership.

Livestock owners should be familiar with all individuals with legitimate access to the land on which they run livestock. This includes landowners, recreational outdoorsmen, oil and gas lease operators or inspectors, and even utility service providers.

Have a plan for reporting theft or trespassing incidents, including contact numbers for law enforcement and insurance providers. After a suspected theft, first contact the local county sheriff's office. Secondly, call the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal

Health to report stolen livestock to auction markets across the state. While multiple agencies within the state will respond, ranchers should also look outside Kansas for pilfered livestock, especially since we are so close to the state line here in southeast Kansas.

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. Check with your insurance provider about their offerings in this type of situation.

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