

Tattooing 101: Reviewing the Basics of Identifying Calves

Identification of animals is a Jersey breeder's first responsibility when a calf is born. It is also one of the most important, as identification is essential for keeping genetic information as accurate as possible.

Permanent identification for registration by the American Jersey Cattle Association can be done by either tattoo or approved tamperproof American ID eartags in both ears.

The Tattooing Rule

The requirements are set forth in Rule II, Identification, of the Rules for the Registration and Transfer of Jersey Cattle:

Sec. 2 (a) For Animals Identified by Tattoos

All calves identified by tattoos must be tattooed before leaving individual pens or ties. One or both ears may be used, and the letter and numbers in the ears must be stated on the application for registration. No two animals of the same sex in the same herd may have the same tattoo. Tattoos must include at least one letter and one number. The letters I, O, Q and V may be used only if accompanied by an additional letter in the same ear, or approved by the Executive Secretary.

Tattoos may not exceed a total of seven letters and numbers in each ear. It is the owner's responsibility to maintain a valid and legible tattoo in the ear of each animal owned.

When a tattoo correction is required, the owner must notify the AJCA of the correction, which will then be made in the records of the Association.

When a tattoo becomes faded, the owner must re-tattoo the animal in the same ear with the same tattoo.

The Basic Procedure

The AJCA Board of Directors first adopted a Voluntary Tattoo Program in 1958 to promote accuracy of record keeping.

1. Select any letter (except I, O, Q, and V).
2. Number the calves consecutively from 1 to 999, the number preceded by the letter you have selected. For example, if you select M as your letter, the tattoos will read M1, M2, M3, and so on.
3. Put the same tattoo in both ears. In case the tattoo should fade in one ear, the animal can still be positively identified from the other ear.
4. After you have tattooed number 999, select a new letter and start over beginning with 1.

Please note the following:

- a. Vaccination tattoos are NOT acceptable as positive identification.
- b. No two living animals of the same sex in the same herd may have the same tattoo. The voluntary program, when correctly followed, will prevent that from happening. If, however, you buy an animal that has the same tattoo as another cow in your herd, you must apply for a new tattoo for one of them.
- c. If a tattoo fades, you should re-tattoo the same ear with the same tattoo. Then, complete an Application for Tattoo Correction form and return it to the AJCA. No fee is required.



Gathering materials is the first step in getting ready to tattoo.

Getting Started

Work in an environment that is as clean as possible. To enhance biosecurity, wear gloves, use separate cloths or pads to clean animals' ears, and disinfect equipment between animals.

First, gather the necessary materials:

- halter;
- alcohol pads or rubbing alcohol and a soft, clean cloth;
- spray bottle of rubbing alcohol;
- tattoo ink; and
- tattoo kit.

Consider the purchase of a small animal tattoo kit. The smaller numbers are easier to insert in a Jersey calf's ear. The tattoo will grow with the calf.

Be sure to maintain tattooing equipment, keeping it clean and replacing broken or dull characters. A build-up of dirt or broken and/or dull equipment can result in improper or illegible tattoos.

Tattooing Procedures

Step 1. Clean Ear With Alcohol

Using an alcohol pad, clean out the ear completely. Wax interferes with the permanency of the ink; if wax is mixed with the ink, the tattoo will most likely fade. Hair can also interfere with a proper tattoo, so the ears may need to be clipped.

If no alcohol pads are available, rubbing alcohol and a soft, clean cloth will also work, as long as the wax is completely removed.



A clean ear is the first step to a successful tattoo. Clipping ears may be necessary to avoid interference from hair.



Two varieties of ink available are the roll-on (top) and the paste (bottom). The roll-on variety is most commonly used.

Step 2. Types of Ink

Many brands of indelible ink are available through your supply house. The roll-on applicators have been proven to save ink and make the job cleaner.



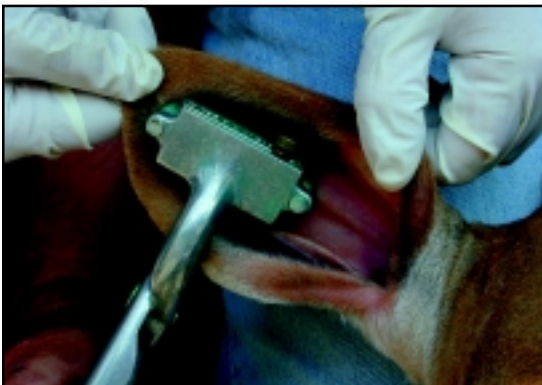
Apply ink between the first and second ribs. The ink should thoroughly cover the skin.

Step 3. Applying Ink

Apply a generous amount of ink over the area to be tattooed, usually between the middle ribs of the ear. Keep out of the hair around the edge of the ear. An area slightly larger than the tattoo equipment should be covered.

Step 4. Tattooing

Get a secure hold on the calf. After checking the tattoo by punching it into a piece of paper, position the tongs in the center of the ear and squeeze firmly. Avoiding the ribs will prevent bleeding. Be sure to lift the tongs out straight; many tattoos have been ruined by scratches.



Keep a firm grip on the calf to avoid any movement that could cause the tongs to slip.



Sanitizing tattooing equipment is just one way to follow biosecurity protocol.

Step 5. Reapplying Ink

Again, apply ink and rub in firmly. This single step will assure a lasting tattoo, if you have followed the above procedure.

Step 6. Sanitizing Equipment

Sanitize tongs between calves by spraying rubbing alcohol on the tongs and the individual tattoo pieces. This should be done before and after each procedure.



A legal tattoo has at least one number and one letter. After several weeks, the tattoo should become legible as the dried ink flakes out of the calf's ear.

Step 7. The Finished Product.

After several weeks, the ink will dry and flake out of the ear, leaving a legible tattoo and a permanent means of identification. A note of caution—remind your veterinarian that there is a tattoo in that ear and that it should be avoided when the vaccination tattoo is inserted.

If you have questions, contact the AJCA Records Department at 614/861-3636 or email Records@USJersey.com.

Suppliers of Tattoo Equipment

- American Livestock Supply Inc., P.O. Box 8441, Madison, Wis. 53708-8441; phone 800/356-0700; website www.americanlivestock.com
- Jeffers Livestock, P.O. Box 100, Dothan, Ala. 36302-0100; phone 800/533-3377; website www.jefferslivestock.com
- NASCO, 901 Janesville Ave., Fort Atkinson, Wis. 53538-0901, or 4825 Stoddard Rd., Modesto, Calif. 95356-9318; phone 800/558-9595; website www.enasco.com
- PBS Livestock Supply, 2800 Leemont Ave. NW, Canton, Ohio 44711-9101; phone 800/321-0235