



## **Procedures for Tattooing Market Hogs**

### **Ken Kephart and Bob Mikesell**

### **April 2002**

#### **Background**

The United States Department of Agriculture is requiring meat processors to maintain unique identity and the farm of origin for all show pigs purchased for slaughter. Hatfield Quality Meats has been a strong supporter of Pennsylvania's county fairs and the Pennsylvania Farm Show and will continue to support the youth exhibitors at these events. In order to comply with the USDA directive, Hatfield now requires that all show hogs be uniquely tattooed before they are transported to the processing plant.

#### **Materials Needed**

- Slap tattooer.
- Sufficient number of dies to apply a unique tattoo number to each hog in your show or sale.
- Black tattoo ink. Small paintbrush or dauber for applying ink to the dies.
- A small pen in which to tattoo the hogs.

#### **Procedures**

- Load the dies into the slap tattooer. The digits will appear inverted when correctly inserted into the tattooer, but the left digit in the tattoo number will still be on your left when loading the dies. You can start with number 1, or you could match a unique tag number applied at the time of the show. In either case, Hatfield will use a lot number for the county; this, and your unique tattoo number will enable them to trace the hog back to the farm of origin if necessary.
- Apply a lot of ink to the dies. In fact, the sloppier the dies look, the more legible the number will appear on the carcass. This is especially important for black hogs.
- Always stand behind the hog and slap the tattooer firmly against the middle of one shoulder. When applying the tattoo, keep all of the dies flat against the shoulder. If the tattooer is tilted slightly, one digit may not appear on the carcass.
- Re-ink the tattooer and slap the other shoulder.
- When you're finished, you should see lots of ink splattered on the shoulder.

#### **Where to Purchase a Tattoo Set**

Two possible vendors are listed below.

- Frey Livestock Supply, 800-399-3739, [ffrey@freysupply.com](mailto:ffrey@freysupply.com)
- NASCO, 800-558-9595

### Important Points to Remember

- Keep the pig in a fairly small pen when tattooing.
- Make sure the hogs are at least 150 lbs before applying the tattoos.
- Use plenty of ink.
- The ink will remain in the carcass permanently. When using the black ink, it does wash off your skin and out of clothing with adequate soap and warm water. The ink is just a mixture of carbon and alcohol.
- Always stand behind the hog when tattooing.
- After tattooing one shoulder, re-ink the dies before tattooing the other shoulder.
- You don't have to hit the hog very hard – just be sure the dies are flat against the shoulder so that each digit makes good contact.
- Sometimes on very lean hogs, the tattooer will stick slightly. This is because the dies are penetrating the hard tissue beneath the thin covering on these lean hogs.
- Remember to change the number after each hog. This is easy to forget.



**Slap tattooer.**



**Use plenty of ink.**



**When applying the tattoo, stand behind the hog.**



**Tattoo complete.**