

Hog Tattooing



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After all the hard work and financial investment put into your hogs, your success comes down to a clear and readable tattoo. It is this tattoo that ensures you are being paid for each finished hog you have produced and shipped to the packer.

At the 6th Annual Red Deer Swine Technology Workshop, Charlie Jamieson, from the Western Hog Exchange, reviewed the processes that will ensure readable tattoos on your hogs.

Proper Equipment

Four pieces of equipment are required for tattooing: digits, tattoo hammer, ink and an ink application brush.

Digits

- Ensure digits are placed correctly in the hammer. When looking down the hammer handle, with the hammer head away from you, place digits in the head upside down by starting on the left side. After tightening the digits in place, test that they are correct by pushing the digits on a piece of paper, cardboard or styrofoam. When the paper is turned 180 degrees, you should be reading your correct number.
- Wash hammer head with a pressure washer to remove any build-up of hair or dirt. Or clean digits by submersing the hammer head in varsol, gas or diesel overnight. Scrub the digits with a steel brush. Rinse with hot water and let dry. With the new water-based ink, just wash with water.
- Replace digits that have bent or are missing needles. It is a good idea to keep a couple of spare sets on hand.

Tattoo Hammer

- Digits need to be secured in the hammer head. Check periodically during tattooing.

Ink

- Black food grade hog tattooing ink is the only ink approved for use in Alberta.
- Store ink at room temperature. If the container has been sitting for awhile, make sure to stir or shake it before use.
- Apply a liberal amount of blank ink to your brush. To ensure that the hammer digit needles are completely covered with ink, turn the hammer a quarter inch on the brush.

Brush

- Ensure the brush surface is flat. Replace this brush when the middle becomes dish shaped or too many bristles are missing from the middle.

Proper Procedure

With the correct equipment and proper procedure, tattoos should come out clear.

- Tattoo hogs close to shipping time as tattoo marks begin to fade after 48 hours.
- Tattoo hogs in a confined area, such as an alley. Take time to make sure that each animal carries a good tattoo mark.
- Know what side the packer requires the tattoo.
- Apply ink to the hammer before **each** hog is tattooed.
- Re-ink the brush after 15 to 20 hogs.
- Strike the hog squarely and firmly on the flat part of the shoulder. The hammer handle should be parallel to the hog as the digit needles are penetrating the skin. The numbers should read vertically up the shoulder.
- If the first tattoo has been poorly applied, place a second tattoo near the first one (on the shoulder or ribs).
- Double check all your paperwork to ensure that these numbers correspond with the tattoo number applied to the hogs.

In Conclusion

A clear and readable tattoo is how you are paid for your hog. Partially readable tattoos result in hogs being allocated to you (shown as a Alloc on hog settlements from Olymel). Review your settlements to understand how clear your tattoos are. Allocations are a sign that it is time to review the your tattooing procedure and inspect your tattooing equipment.

For more information on the hog tattooing procedure, or to purchase digits, brushes, ink and tattoo hammers, please contact Gord at the Western Hog Exchange (Balzac Terminal) 403-226-0332.

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