



Retention projects: Early results from the feeder calf sector

In a search for solutions to the problem of tags falling off in bovine operations, ATQ has launched three retention projects since 2008 to evaluate modified tags and tags from different manufacturers.

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Tag comparison

The FDX Retention project compares the retention of tags from three companies (Allflex, Reyflex and Destron) on dairy and beef farms. A total of 500 adult subjects were retagged in a collaboration between producers and ATQ staff.

After two years, we have found a significant difference between loss rates in dairy herds and beef herds. There are two explanations for the difference: the more aggressive behaviour of slaughter animals compared to dairy animals, and the environment of beef cows. The latter spend the winter in cold stables, the summer in pasturage, surrounded by trees, fences that often are not electrified, or feed troughs with vertical pipes.

In slaughter operations, it was found that for two of the companies in the test, the male parts of some tags tended to break (see Table 1). This breakage eventually resulted in complete loss of the tag. So far we have found similar loss rates for all three companies.

A reinforced tag

The *High Breaking Load and Combo Tags* project was conducted only in slaughter operations, where 270 animals were retagged. The high breaking load tags had a reinforced tag stem, while the combo tags had a large visual panel combined with an RFID chip. After 18 months, the high breaking load tags had a loss rate of just four per cent for both the electronic part and the visual panel; there



The combo tag is highly appreciated by producers taking part in the project.

was only one breakage of a male part. For the combo tags, losses were around two per cent for the electronic part and less than one per cent for the visual part, and again just one male part was broken. It's worth noting that producers appreciate the visual aspect of combo tags, because when the animals are out to pasture it makes visual identification much easier.

A tag of more flexible plastic

To overcome the problems of male parts breaking and tags falling off, the *Ultraflexible Plastic Retention* project was launched early in 2009, with 380 animals

being retagged. This project compares three models of Allflex tags: the regular tag that is currently being distributed, a tag made of ultraflexible plastic with standard male parts, and an ultraflexible tag with rounded male parts. The latter include a button that completely surrounds the stem, to make the tag more resistant to the physical stresses of the bovine environment. This male part also has a rear visual panel that is rounded to make it less likely to catch on things, while still enabling visual identification of the animal.

Tags of ultraflexible plastic are designed to slip free of anything that could damage them, whereas regular tags and high breaking load tags have to be built sturdy.

So far in the project, regular tags and ultraflexible tags with standard male parts have similar results for loss and breakage. In contrast, ultraflexible tags with rounded male parts have had no losses or breakage at all. Though it may be early to draw conclusions, since the project has been running for just over a year, it looks as though the

rounded male parts do a better job of surviving the bovine environment. The coming months will let us evaluate the three types of tag more objectively.

ATQ's tests are promising, but the future will tell us more about the real performance of these products. ATQ will keep you informed about further developments in a future article. Rest assured that ATQ is committed to meeting the needs of bovine producers and will continue working to find the best product.

Table 1 - Proportion of damaged male parts (after 24 months)

Suppliers	Broken male parts Chip side	Broken male parts Panel side
Allflex	21%	10%
Reyflex	26%	5%
Destron	0%	0%

Table 2 - Loss rates - feeder calf operation (after 24 months)

Suppliers	Loss rate Electronic	Loss rate Visual
Allflex	11%	18%
Reyflex	11%	25%
Destron	29%	8%



The rounded male part of the ultraflexible plastic tag.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATQ