

Retention: A producer weighs in

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Last September, Agri-Traçabilité Québec (ATQ) met with Claude Lefebvre and Lucie Rainville, of the Gerville farm (photo A) in Baie-du-Febvre. Lefebvre and Rainville, who own a 225-head free-stall herd, were among 16 dairy farms participating in a study on cattle tag retention. They shared their experience with us.

The four-year study tested the quality of tags and determined the factors that lead to tag loss. Results so far suggest that there are three main factors that help tag retention.

Human intervention

The placement of the tag on the ear has an impact on the life span of the tag. Mr. Lefebvre, who is himself a calm man, believes that a producer's temperament can affect the behaviour of the herd. The more an animal is anxious, the likely it will be to yank its head back out of the feeder, the resulting friction accelerating tags' deterioration.

External factors: physical environment and climate

Some free-stall farms have shown better results, and feeder and barrier types affect tag loss. On the Gerville farm, feeders are adapted to the ages of animals (photos B, C, D). "Generally speaking," Mr. Lefebvre explains, "the fewer mechanical or moving parts there are on a barrier, and the fewer sharp metal edges are near animals' heads, the less the tags get caught." As well, animals that are sheltered from significant temperature changes tend to keep their tags longer, since cold and heat dry out the plastic tags, causing breakage.

Identification tags

Tag loss worsens after the fourth year, due to friction, changes in temperature, and normal wear.

Encouraging results

The Gerville farm review was promising, after a 60-month period, tag loss was 16 per cent. For Mr. Lefebvre, the results are satisfactory. After all, he says, "We can't expect everything to be a hundred percent. I'm optimistic, and I think we need to leave ourselves room to change. In any case, identifying animals is much easier now



Oldest son Simon, Lucie Rainville, and Claude Lefebvre.



Adult feeders with horizontal bars.

that we have the ATQ tags."

The tag retention project will be concluded at the end of the year, and results will be published in spring 2011.

The ATQ is aware of the challenges producers face, and we are working continuously to find solutions to those challenges.



Diagonal feed barriers for dry cows, heifers less than 12 months of age, and pregnant heifers.



Self-locking head gates for heifers aged between 12 and 18 months, to prevent movement during covering or other treatments.

Two Easy-to-Avoid Pitfalls

- Baler twine
- Sharp-edged bars (add a rubber tip, or a metal cap with rounded edges)

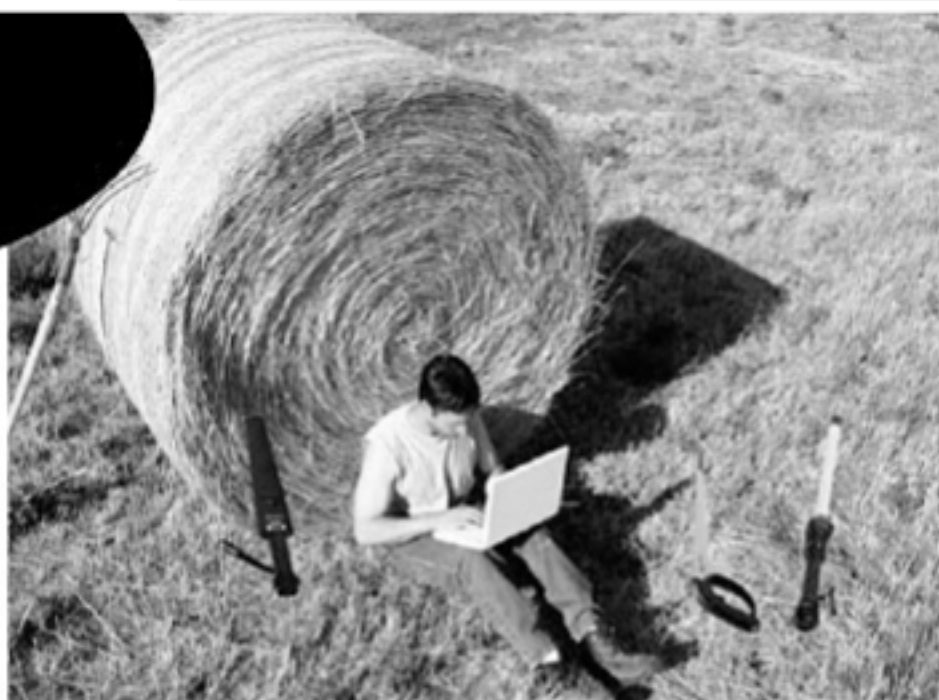
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