

Amid pandemic, ranchers should be on high alert

By

tscra.org Posted 3-19-20

https://tscra.org/amid-pandemic-ranchers-should-be-on-high-alert/?fbclid=IwAR0qPiBHhBLhLrrz3U_HH3SPSSL_-CCoXvHCiJy3VozPk65gbgpCUIW3RKM

Theft and scams on the rise during uncertain times

Fort Worth, Texas — The coronavirus pandemic's impact on the cattle market has been dramatic already. But that's not the only threat to ranchers' livelihood, according to Scott Williamson. The executive director of law enforcement, brand and inspection services for Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association said thefts and scams targeting cattlemen are on the rise, too.

"Economic and industry distress always increases the number of desperate people that will take fraudulent, dishonorable and criminal actions," he said.

That desperation works both ways — more people turning to theft and deception to make ends meet and more people buying or selling in a panicked state that may have clouded their judgment.

"You may feel like you need to get in a hurry to sell some cattle before it gets worse or get in a hurry to buy while the prices are low," Williamson said. "But please slow down and be prudent, because con men and thieves are taking advantage of this situation."

He said it's especially important to be careful when buying or selling over the internet.

"Be extremely wary," he said. "Be sure you have some way to absolutely confirm who that person is. My suggestion is don't do any business without being able to tangibly lay your eyes on it or meet someone. I know that seems like overkill to some people, but you just can't be too careful."

Earlier this week, Williamson received a call that proved his point. A cattleman had purchased a truckload of cows represented as one thing, but when they arrived, they were another. Unfortunately, he had already wired the money.

"This gets especially dangerous because your perception or agreements over the phone do not likely predicate a criminal charge or investigation," Williamson said.

He offered the following tips for avoiding fraud:

- Verify the person you are attempting to do business with a trusted source.
- When selling items consider payment options such as an escrow service or online payment system.
- Never accept a check or cashier's check for more than the value of the sale.

- Confirm checks are valid by contacting your bank or the issuing bank.
- When buying items never issue payment until the items are received unless you have complete trust in the seller.
- Always inspect and document livestock or items before taking delivery, and remember, you have the right to refuse delivery.
- If you believe you are a victim of a bait and switch purchase, act quickly. The more time that lapses, the more it appears you were initially agreeable to the transaction and the ability to remedy the problem erodes.

To prevent theft, Williamson advises ranchers to:

- Display TSCRA member sign on gates and entrances. It is a proven deterrent.
- Lock gates.
- Brand cattle and horses. Make sure the brand is recorded with the county clerk.
- Put driver's license number on all saddles, tack and equipment.
- Videotape horses and tack. Keep complete and accurate descriptions on file. Establish an organized, easy-to-find proof of ownership file to save valuable time in recovery process.
- Count cattle regularly.
- Don't establish a routine when feeding. Vary the times you feed.
- Be cautious about who gets keys and combinations.
- If possible, park trailers and equipment where they are out of view from the roadway.
- Keep tack rooms and saddle compartments on trailers locked.
- Don't feed in pens.
- Participate in neighborhood crime watch programs.
- Don't build pens close to a roadway.
- Never leave keys in tractors or other equipment.

"Cattle raisers have weathered a lot of storms over the years, and we'll weather this one, too," Williamson said. "But in the meantime, be extra careful."