

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR COW IS?

by Joy Fitzhugh, Legislative Analyst

If my phone rings at 2 a.m. and I see the California Highway Patrol caller identification, I just ask, "Where is it?" Thank goodness, more often than not it is not our cow – but like so many other ranchers, we crawl out and go.

Cattle on the county's highways are not a new problem, but the CHP needs a better way to locate the owners. For example, in just a two-week period in February, there were 38 head of cattle found out on public roads. Farm Bureau is trying to help in this effort to identify livestock owners by organizing a Livestock Owner ID Committee.

At the San Luis Obispo County Cattlemen's Annual meeting, we completed a trial run of the Owner ID program, getting livestock owners to locate on maps where they have cattle along public roads and identify who to call if their cattle, horses, sheep or goats are playing on the highway. *A link to the Livestock Owner ID form is on the Farm Bureau website, slofarmbureau.org.*

The California Highway Patrol called the Farm Bureau late in 2009, explaining that they were having difficulty locating the owners of livestock out on the roads in our county. We formed a committee that includes representatives from the CHP, Sheriff's Department, Cattlemen's Association, CalTrans, the Brand Inspector, CattleWomen, the Ag. Commissioner's office, Red Cross and Farm Bureau.

Through this committee, we have developed a Livestock Owner Identification form that gives the owner an opportunity to show the agencies where they have cattle along what roads. These information forms are strictly confidential, only to be used by the CHP and other law enforcement agencies to locate livestock owners.

We had more than 30 ranchers sign-up at the Cattlemen's Annual meeting, and we'll be taking the form and map to other area meetings and the MidState Fair this summer. The Ag. Commissioner's office, thanks to Marlene Barstch, is tabulating the livestock owners' information and putting identifications on a set of county maps. Our next step is to develop the notification format so that it will be a quick method for the CHP to find the landowners and call them, or their designated representative, when their cattle get out.

We have included the Livestock Owner Identification Form on our Farm Bureau website, and we also have forms we can either fax or mail to you to fill out. ***We only ask that you help us help you protect your livestock. Print the ID form, fill it out and send it in to the address shown.***