

ASC-130
SHEEP IDENTIFICATION SYSTEMS
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Effective management systems are based on accurate records. Accurate records require accurate identification of each sheep in the flock. The common forms of sheep identification are ear tags, tattoos, fleece brands and ear notches. Each offers unique advantages and disadvantages to the sheep producer.

Ear Tags

There are a variety of sizes and types of metal sheep tags available. Selection of tag size must take into account readability and potential tag loss. Smaller tags are easier to apply in very young lambs, but more difficult to read without catching the sheep. Ear tags used in lambs destined for slaughter should be easy to apply and economical.



Duplicate tags should be used in each ear to retain identification in the event of tag loss. The self-piercing interlocking styles permit quick, easy application.

Non-metallic tags come in a wide variety of materials, shapes, sizes and costs. A wide selection of colors of tags and inks permits color coding to identify sire groups, year of birth, etc. Non-metallic tags offer the advantages of being more easily read, and many styles can be numbered and/or lettered as they are used for a specific identification system ([Figure 1](#).

Ear tags and corresponding paint brand).

The most popular tags are free-swinging and result in the least irritation to the ear following application. Ear tags should be applied between the middle and lower cartilage ribs in the ear and far enough out on



the ear to allow for later wool growth. Band-type tags should be placed far enough from the edge of the ear to permit ear growth, as shown in [Figure 2](#). Ear tags should be placed between the middle and lower cartilage ribs in the ear and far enough out on the ear to allow for later wool growth. Band-type ear tags should be placed far enough from the edge of the ear to permit ear growth.

If disinfectant is used in the tagging process, any excess should be removed so moisture is not trapped between the tag and the ear. Animals should be observed closely following tagging for any complications, such as swelling or infection.

Tattoos

Ear (and less commonly flank) tattoos provide an excellent means of permanent identification since they normally last the life of the animal. They have two disadvantages in that it is necessary to handle the sheep to read tattoos and they may be difficult to read in dark-skinned animals.

Tattoo applicators range from very simple to more complex. Economics and convenience will dictate

choice of applicator. Inks are available in black, green, red and white and in paste and liquid form. Black ink is most commonly used in white-eared breeds and green in dark-eared breeds.

The tattooing process begins with cleaning the ear with alcohol to remove wax and dirt (Figure 3). The tattoos should be tested on an index card to be certain that the characters are correct as shown in Figure 4. The imprint is then made with the tattoo applicator between the ear cartilages in a location that will not interfere with later ear tagging. Tattoo ink is then rubbed into the tattoo (see Figures 3-7). If a roller applicator is not used, an old soft toothbrush works very well for this purpose. Plastic gloves will keep hands clean.

Tattoo needles must make holes large enough to let an adequate amount of ink into the skin. New dies are often too sharp to make effective tattoos, but filing the points may help. Tattoo equipment should be cleaned between animals to prevent possible spread of disease.

Figure 3. Step 1: Cleaning the Ear



Figure 4. Step 2: Testing the Characters

Editors Note: Number on card should be 760. does not show up well in photograph.



Figure 5. Step 3: Applying the Tattoo





Figure 6. Step 4: Rubbing In the Ink



Figure 7. Step 5: The Finished Tattoo

Fleece Brands

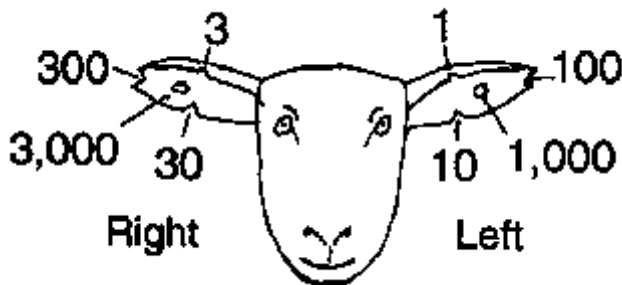
Fleece brands provide an easy form of non-permanent identification of sheep. Only sheep branding fluid should be used for such brands. Wool processors have a growing concern with "paint" contamination, and "branded" fleeces will meet more resistance in marketing.

Two-inch brands can be used to identify very young lambs and facilitate their management (See Figure 1). Larger brands (four-inch) can be used on ewes. At least 1/2 inch of wool is necessary to "hold" the branding fluid.

One effective use of fleece brands is to identify ewe and lamb units by placing the ewe's number on the right side of singles and the left side of twins, etc., soon after birth. Another is to use brands to identify ewes at breeding time to facilitate keeping breeding records.

Ear Notches

Ear notches are among the oldest forms of animal identification. The system illustrated in Figure 8 is similar to one used in swine. Each location on the ear is assigned a number as necessary to achieve a



given number. Although large numbers of sheep can be individually identified quickly with simple ear notches, everyone working the sheep must fully understand the system and keep accurate records so that duplicate numbers do not occur.

Figure 8. Since the numbers are additive, the animal shown has the number 4444.

Animal Designation

The following are suggested systems of animal designation. The National Sheep Improvement Program permits any combination of seven numbers and/or letters but no spaces, hyphens, etc. The systems indicated by an asterisk (*) will work best for this program.

Animal Number	Explanation
91001*	This number identifies the first lamb born in 1991.
1001	A shorter version of the above system.
A001*	'A' designates a given year - A=1991. This is the first lamb born in 1991.
9101J*	This is the first lamb born in 1991 and sired by ram "J."
D9101T*	This is the first Dorset lamb born in 1991 sired by ram "T." The first letter might also be used to designate the breed of dam.

