

Identifying Sheep and Goats

State and Federal Scrapie Requirements: Identifying Sheep and Goats

Ear Tags for Sheep and Goats?

Beginning November 2001, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires that certain classes of sheep and goats have premise identification ear tags applied BEFORE they are moved from their farm to be sold in interstate commerce OR commingled with sheep and goats from any other farms. Compliance action in Texas will not be taken until April 1, 2002.

Identification requirements extend to:

- ALL sheep 18 months of age or older
- ALL breeding sheep regardless of age
- Sexually intact show or exhibition sheep and goats
- ALL goats 18 months of age or older that are or have been commingled with sheep
- ALL breeding goats that are or have been commingled with sheep.

NOTE: *Identification for goats:* Tattoos may be used to identify registered or meat and dairy show goats, as long as the animals are accompanied by their registration papers. A PREMISE identification number should be obtained and the ear tags should be applied to animals being culled or animals no longer accompanied by registration papers.

Commercial goats and wethers that have not had contact with sheep are exempt from identification requirements.

Texas Regulations

The Texas regulations for intrastate movement will be drafted and presented to the Texas Animal Health Commission in February 2002. TAHC regulations will mirror the USDA premise identification requirements.

How Much Will Tags Cost?

Aside from the time it takes to attach the eartag prior to loading sheep and goats for shipment, there is no cost if you use the white metal or white plastic tags provided through the state-federal program. In meetings with industry representatives, a preference for a PREMISE identification system was expressed. Therefore, owners will be assigned a unique, permanent PREMISE identification number. Supplies of ear tags will carry this number, and a sequential number on the reverse side, which owners may use in maintaining individual animal

records.

A free pair of tag pliers will be provided with the first shipment of tags. To get your PREMISE identification number and order free tags, call the toll-free designated toll-free "tag line" at (866) 873-2824. Tags are shipped

Approved vendors offer other styles of official PREMISE identification tags that may be purchased after you get your premise number. A list of approved vendors can be obtained by calling the toll-free "tag line," or checking the web site: www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/scrapie.htm

Tagging and Records

Identified sheep and goats may carry several ear tags, depending on how many premises or flocks from which they have been moved or sold. Tags are to accurately reflect the premises on which the animals have been commingled with other sheep or goats.

Federal regulations require that records on purchases and sales be maintained for five years for disease investigation purposes. To comply with record keeping requirements when selling sheep and goats at the livestock market, have your premise identification number recorded on the market check-in document.

For private treaty transactions, be sure the seller has met tagging requirements and record the seller's premise identification number on your receipt or bill of sale.

Why Identify?

In 1947, Scrapie, a fatal degenerative brain disease affecting sheep and goats, was accidentally introduced into the U.S.

Although older animals can be exposed and become infected, lambs and kids are most susceptible to the disease. Usually, lambs and kids are exposed to Scrapie through fluids and tissues associated with birthing,

Scrapie develops slowly, and infected animals usually don't show signs of the disease — including weight loss, tremors, loss of coordination, swaying, or wool pulling — until they are 18 months of age or older. Infected dams may shed the infectious agent, or prion, during lambing without showing clinical signs of disease.

The true prevalence of Scrapie in the U.S. is not known. In the past, surveillance, animal identification methods and eradication programs have not been successful. The PREMISE identification system will enable epidemiologists to traced diseased animals to their flocks or herds. This is a key element in this disease eradication effort.

An Issue Affecting Trade

Animal industries in today's global marketplace must conduct adequate disease surveillance and provide accurate information on disease prevalence and eradication to maintain trade opportunities for live animals and animal products, such as breeding stock, semen and embryos.

The American Sheep Industry Association (ASI), in 1998, identified Scrapie as an important trade issue, estimating the industry loses more than \$20 million each year in lost export sales, extra disposal costs for dead sheep and offal, and lost productivity. In the settlement of an ASI-filed trade action suit, federal funds were committed to support a national Scrapie eradication program.

Eradicating the disease will heighten the industry's credibility and reputation for supplying wholesome and healthy animals and products. By 2010, U.S. animal health officials and sheep industry leaders say Scrapie can be eliminated. By 2017, the U.S. goal is to be declared officially Scrapie-free by international standards.

Historically, black-faced or black-faced crossbred sheep have been stricken with Scrapie most often. For international trade purposes, the livestock industry must prove that other sheep breeds, and goats, are not affected.

The benefits of eradicating the disease? Australia and New Zealand have Scrapie-free designations, and these nations freely sell breeding stock worldwide with minimal restrictions.

After Ear Tags, What?

Slaughter surveillance for Scrapie in sheep will begin soon, as a disease detection tool. For the first time, this

The incidence of Scrapie in goats has been extremely low, so slaughter sampling for this species will not be conducted at this time. However, goats are susceptible to Scrapie, and when they are commingled with sheep,

Scrapie in My Flock?

Based on the exposure risk, owner's needs, and applicable regulations, a state or federal regulatory veterinarian will develop a clean-up and monitoring plan for diseased and exposed flocks. This may include a combination of partial depopulation and movement restrictions to prevent potential disease spread.

The use of pilot projects will provide more options to producers for the elimination of Scrapie, while retaining valuable genetics.

A federal indemnity payment based on fair market value will be available. A premium will be paid for registered animals based on their age.

In the past, the only way to detect Scrapie was to examine brain tissue. A live animal test, called the "third eyelid test" is expected to be approved by late 2002 and will be used to test suspect or exposed animals. Genetic testing is also being evaluated to determine disease-resistance of animals.

Moving Sheep & Goats

As always, it is a good idea to check with the state of destination before moving livestock across state lines.

Scrapie Certification

A voluntary Scrapie certification program has been instituted, and if you'd like to know more, call the Texas USDA-APHIS -VS office in Austin at (512) 916-5552. A brochure also is available by mail.