

## Identification Options

The ideal sheep identification is permanent, resistant to loss or tearing, easily readable at a distance, easy to apply and gives all of the information we desire at a glance. Unfortunately one doesn't exist. Many producers ask which is the best time of identification and our response is: "It depends on what the purpose is for the shepherd." The best type of I.D. varies from farm to farm. Here are our thoughts on the options available, pro's and con's, good and bad.

### Ear Tags

Ear Tags are generally the favored type of identification. They are easy to apply and stay in pretty well. If applied properly they can be read at a distance. There are a variety of types of tags available. Plastic tags are less reactive than metal tags.

Temple Tags – These are a favorite for many of our producers. Temple tags are plastic and have an open end to prevent ripping of the ear if they get hung up in a fence or twine string. Occasionally we still have lost tags. They are available in a variety of colors. Many producers use a different color for birth year, or sire of the ram. Custom lettering and number sequences are available. They are weather resistant however the color of the imprinted number will fade making the number difficult to read in dim light. Temple tags require using an ear punch to first punch a hole in the ear and then you need to insert the tag.

Kemco Tags – These are aluminum tags that are in numbered sequence. They are inexpensive but sheep lose them pretty easily as they seem to tear out when they get caught. Since they are metal they can cause infection in the ear. The applicator is very good and sheep can be tagged quickly.

Tambra Tags – Tambra tags are small brass tags that are ideal for tagging small or newborn lambs. They are light so they will not pull down on the ear. Because of the small size the lamb needs to be caught to read the tag. The retention is short and producers who use these tags will retag the sheep with a larger tag when they get older. Tambra tags require a Tambra tag pliers.

Duflex Tags – Duflex tags are plastic tags that are available in many sizes, colors, numbered or blank. The larger tags can be read at a distance and work great for those of us whose eyes are not as good as they used to be. Duflex tags are more expensive but are non-reactive to tissue. They are two piece tags that are a bit cumbersome to get on the applicator the first time you are using them. Retention rate is good but the larger the tag the more likely they are to snag and tear out. If you use blank tags be sure to write numbers on heavy, preferably the night before you tag the sheep so they have a chance to dry. If the writing is heavy it will be readable for year in the future.

### Tattooing –

Tattooing is great identification in that if it is done correctly it is 100% permanent. The major disadvantage is that it cannot be read at a distance. In order to have the best tattoos we recommend green not black ink be used. The tattoo pliers comes with a jar of black ink. Throw it away and use green. The tattoo will be more legible. The other trick is to apply the ink after, not before you apply the tattoo. We recommend that you use an old toothbrush to rub the ink into the holes. If you get a lot of blood when you tattoo the sheep you are squeezing the pliers too hard. Holes that bleed do not take ink very well and make the tattoo hard to read. The other disadvantage to tattoos is that they are time consuming to apply. Taking your time to make sure the right number is in the right sheep and the digits don't get scattered all over the barn is important.

### Sticks, Sprays and Chalk

Sheep marking chalk is a favorite for many producers to keep track as they deworm a group of ewes are vaccinate a group of lambs. The chalk is inexpensive and scourable so it will not stay in the wool. Marks only last a few days and some of the colors are faint. Another disadvantage for me at least is that I manage to break the stick by the third sheep and am often left with a pile of small pieces in my pocket

Paintstick is available in a variety of colors and easy to see a week after the mark. This is probably one of the biggest disadvantages, the marks will still be there a month later. Paintstick should not be used before shearing as the color will damage the wool. It also makes a nasty mess if left in a coverall pocket and goes through the washer.

Sheep Sray Marker is an aerosole spray mark that is easy to use, quick and can be used on dry or wet wool. It is scourable and

marks will last a week or two. In comparison to chalk or paint-sticks it is much more expensive. It dries instantly so sheep will not rub it off on other sheep.

#### Paint Brands

Paint brands have been a favorite for decades for temporary identification in the lambing barn. Many shepherds paint the same number on the ewe as the lamb. The brands last about one month and are easy to see from a distance. Just by walking through the pen you can find the mother of the starving lamb and check to see why. Many producers paint brand the ewes and lambs when they leave the jug starting with 1 on the first ewe and going up from there. This also gives the producer an approximate age of the lambs at a quick glance. The brands work great for the first few weeks and then fade by weaning so if you don't want to lose track of the lambs you will want to get a tag or tattoo in before the paint brand fades.

#### Ear Notches

Ear notches are not very common in the sheep industry but some commercial producers use them as a method of permanently identifying culls. They carry a notcher with them in the lambing barn and notch any ewe that they really don't want to lamb again, bad udders, poor mothers, etc. When it comes time to sell cull ewes they simply sort the notched ewes off in the cull pen.

#### Electronic I.D.

Microchips are currently being used in horses and dogs and some cattle tags. The problem with electronic I.D.'s is that you need a reader to read the I.D. and in the case of microchips the chip tends to migrate around the body of the animal. As far as the sheep industry goes I don't anticipate their use to ever be popular. They are expensive, require a reader, and cannot be used at a distance.