

# IDENTIFYING SHEEP & GOATS

There are many reasons to identify sheep and goats. Unless you have only a few animals, you won't know who's who without some sort of identification. Record keeping starts with identification of individual animals. Identification shows ownership and can help control praedial larceny (theft). ID is necessary for pedigrees and registration. It may (or will) be mandatory for disease-tracing by governments.



There are two types of identification for sheep/goats: temporary and permanent. Temporary forms include neck chains or collars, paint brands, and chalk or crayon marks. Neck chains are popular with dairy animals. Paint brands are popular for sheep.



At least one form of ID should be permanent. Permanent forms of ID include ear tags, ear notches (or punches), tattoos, and microchips. Some breed associations require tattoos or microchipping.



Increasingly, electronic ID (RFID) is being used in sheep/goats. The transponder can be contained in an ear tag, microchip, or rumen bolus. Ear tags are usually favored for sheep, whereas goat producers often microchip their animals. RFID allows for more advanced management. It is required by some governments for disease tracking. The US will likely eventually require RFID for small ruminants.



Ear tags are the most common form of ID in sheep/goats. They are generally considered permanent ID, though it's not uncommon for animals to lose ear tags, even "tamper-proof" ones (like those approved for US scrapie ID). For this reason, double tagging is recommended or tagging in combination with tattooing or notching. There are many styles of ear tags to choose from. Letters, numbers, color, and left and right ear tagging can provide a lot of information about the animal. Proper tagging practices are important to prevent ear infections and loss of tags.