

# THRAPSTON LIVESTOCK CENTRE

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## Sheep Tagging – Electronic Identification (EID)

As many of you will have read in the farming press, sheep EID is being introduced from the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009. There has been considerable negotiation between the industry and DEFRA concerning how this will be implemented and, following a recent EID co-ordination meeting in London, we set out below the current proposals. Please note that EU Ministers still have to “sign off” these proposals, meaning that the rules cannot be guaranteed. However, at present, it is proposed that there should be 3 tagging options for breeders.

1. Full EID for breeding lambs – Double identified. Two visually identical tags (with flock and animal number); 1 tag to contain an electronic chip (providing flock number and animal number).
2. Electronic Batch Tag for sheep destined for slaughter (under 12 months of age) - Single tag with flock number only printed on the tag and containing an electronic chip (providing both flock number and animal number).
3. Manual Batch Tag for sheep destined for slaughter – Single tag printed with flock number only.

### Tag Colours

- All electronic tags will be YELLOW in colour.
- All replacement electronic tags will be RED in colour
- Any of you who decide to Bolus the EID into sheep will identify these with a BLACK tag.

Obviously, the legislation does not come in to effect until the end of 2009, which means that further changes could still be made to these rules. A variety of electronic tags and equipment will be available from different suppliers and we hope to be able to provide further information, in due course and possibly, to hold displays in the market. As you would expect, the costs of tags containing an electronic chip will be higher than the tags currently used, although we understand that the cost per tag should be well below the rumoured figure of £1 per tag.

Clearly, the choice of tagging system will be for individual farmers to decide. However, Thrapston Market would encourage farmers to consider identifying all sheep with a single electronic batch tag, even where lambs are destined for slaughter under 12 months of age. Whilst this may seem to involve an unnecessary cost over and above the simple plastic tags, which could be used; in the light of our discussions with sheep buyers, we feel that, to ensure the maximum possible number of buyers bidding on your sheep, you may wish to consider purchasing an electronic batch tag.

Having reviewed EID with a number of our Thursday sheep buyers, they have pointed that many lambs do not go direct to abattoir, from the market. These animals are taken to holdings for batching with lambs purchased from other sources, in order to produce a level batch to meet individual abattoir specifications or, possibly to go for further feeding.

The problem associated with a manual flock tags are that, where sheep have been mixed with other lambs prior to being sorted into batches, the buyers need to provide a record of the number of animals with different flock numbers, within each batch. Sheep with an electronic tag could be recorded using a handheld or race reading system. However, where manual flock tags have been used (without an electronic chip) the buyers would be required to individually check each ear tag and make a record of the number of animals with a particular flock number in each batch.

Obviously, where lorry loads of over 400 lambs are being batched, ready to go to an abattoir, the suggestion of individually checking manual ear tags may well prove to be prohibitively expensive. It may therefore be that these buyers would only be prepared to purchase lambs which have been electronically batch tagged.

Whilst we cannot be sure as to whether a price differential will emerge between lambs which have been electronically tagged and those which are manually tagged, this might be the end result and certainly, some buyers may decline to bid on your lambs, if they are not electronically tagged.

Please do not be put off by the anticipated cost of tags and readers. At present, you are probably paying 10 – 20 pence for a simple plastic slaughter tag. We understand that a single electronic batch tag is likely to cost in the region of 50 – 70 pence per tag. This is perhaps a premium worth paying, if it increases the number of buyers prepared to bid on your lambs.

As regards electronic tag readers, as a result of discussions between the Livestock Auctioneers Association, DEFRA and the EU, it has been agreed that markets and collection centres can fulfil the necessary function by reading tags and providing a full print out of the relevant information, for retention with your records. For most people, it will not be necessary for individual farmers to purchase your own electronic readers.

If you wish to discuss EID further, then please do not hesitate to contact Brian Pile on **07778 970628**, or James Sealy on **07753 895716**.