

Electronic Identification (EID) of Sheep

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Electronic identification (tagging) is now a requirement on sheep farms. For the majority of farmers the issues are straightforward. Only tags that have been approved for use under the NSIS may be used. (An Electronic Identification set, (EID set) refers to a pair of tags, one being a conventional mart tag for the left ear and one being an EID tag for the right ear.)



A selection of the types of electronic ear tags available for sheep

Main elements of the National Sheep Identification System

If you are a keeper of sheep you are required by law to:

- Register with DAFF and obtain a holding (flock or herd keeper) number.
- Identify all animals before they leave your holding or before they reach 9 months of age, whichever is the earlier.
- Identify all lambs intended for slaughter at the holding of origin and ensure that they retain this one tag number for their life from the holding of origin. These lambs cannot be retagged when moving from one holding to another.
- Ensure that all new sheep (born or first identified after 31 December 2009) **and which are being kept for breeding or being exported live** are tagged with two identifiers bearing the same number, one of which must carry an electronic device. Where boluses are being used, a matching blue tag must be applied at the same time as each bolus.
- Obtain a book of movement or dispatch documents customized for your holding.

- Complete your own movement or dispatch document when animals are moved off your holding.
- Maintain an up-to-date holding or flock register.
- Complete and return an annual sheep census inventory to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. .
- Notify movements of sheep purchased onto your farm directly from another farm (not through a mart) to you local District Veterinary Office



There is no evidence from Teagasc studies that tagging of lambs at birth results in an increased incidence of infection of the ear or or subsequent drooped ears.

What is required

The identification requirements for sheep, as outlined here apply to sheep born after 1 January 2010. **Farmers should be aware that the older animals born before 31 December 2009 do not have to be electronically tagged and can continue to be tagged under the old arrangements**

In general the identification requirements for sheep born after 1 January 2010 are a follows:

1. All sheep must be tagged with at least one tag by 9 months of age or on leaving the holding of birth, which ever comes first.

2. All sheep, born in 2010 or later, and being retained beyond 12 months of age must be double tagged with an EID set.
3. **Sheep intended for slaughter, and going directly to a slaughter premises:** If these are to be sold before 12 months of age, they may be tagged in just the left ear with a conventional slaughter tag also referred to as a **temporary tag**. There is no need for electronic tagging.
4. **Sheep going for sale via a mart or directly to another farm:** If these are sold before 12 months of age they may be tagged in the left ear with a conventional tag which must be approved as a **mart tag**.
5. **Animals being kept for breeding:** These must be double tagged by 9 months of age with a conventional mart tag in the left ear and an electronic tag in the right ear. Both tags will have an identical 12 digit tag number. Both tags will be yellow. (An alternative option to the electronic tag is to fit animals with a bolus in the rumen. The tag fitted on the left ear of a sheep with a ruminal bolus will be light blue in color.)
6. **Animals bought in, to be kept on the farm for breeding.** Animals less than 12 months old bought at marts or directly from another farm, and tagged with one conventional mart tag must be upgraded to double tagging with an EID tag if they are to be retained for breeding. This must be done by the time the animal is 12 months of age. There are two options for upgrading (see note below re: upgrading).

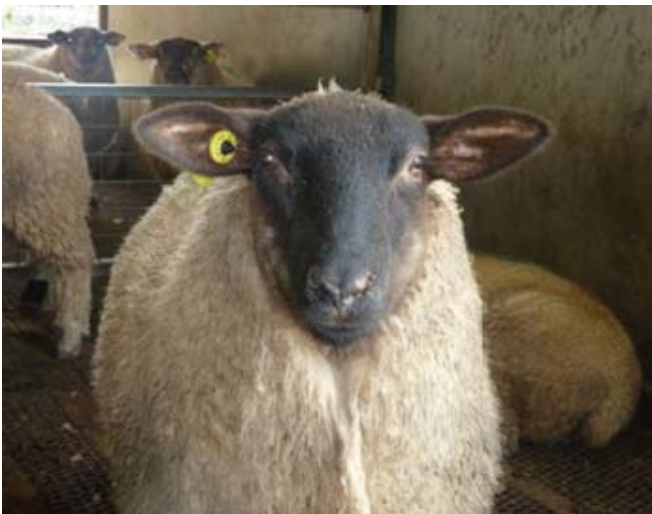


Only tags that have been approved for use under the NSIS may be used.

7. **Tagging of Store Lambs**
 - **Animals bought in, having one conventional mart tag from the holding of origin to be kept on the farm for feeding & destined for slaughter before they are 12 months old.** Since May 2011 animals in this category cannot be re-tagged and must retain the

tag of origin. They then must be listed on your dispatch document as they leave your farm.

- **Recommended optional electronic tagging** - Flock owners selling store lambs or lambs that are likely to be bought for fattening before being slaughtered are recommended to electronically identify their lambs. There are two options. Lambs can be tagged in the right ear with a **single EID tag** (instead of a permanent mart tag) when tagging the lambs on leaving the holding. Sheep identified with such an EID tag should be more attractive to fattener producers who buy in sheep from multiple holdings. A store lamb finisher can then invest in some reading equipment which would automatically generate the tag list after the sheep are scanned. Alternatively, these lambs could be tagged with an EID set
- 8. **Animals bought in already tagged with an EID set.** No further tagging of these animals required.
- 9. **Live Export:** Sheep born after 1 January 2010 and exported live to another country, including to Northern Ireland for slaughter, must be double tagged with a conventional mart tag in the left ear, and either an electronic tag in the right ear or a ruminal bolus. Sheep purchased for export but not identified as above can be upgraded to EID status (see below). Sheep born prior to 1 January 2010 that have already been double tagged with a matching set of conventional tags do not have to be retagged.



For lambs being sold before they reach 12 months of age, the farmer may opt to use a single electronic tag in the right ear

Upgrading to EID status

There are two choices.

1. A custom made EID tag, bearing the same number as the conventional mart tag already on the animal can be ordered. This will then be put on the right ear of the animal.

2. The more convenient system is that the sheep can be re-tagged with a new EID set from your own stock of tag sets, and the new tag number correlated to the old number in the flock register. The remaining tag can be left in or removed unless the animal is being exported in which case it must be left in. If the remaining tag is electronic it must be removed in all cases.



EID combined with electronic data loggers will greatly facilitate data recording in sheep flocks.

Lost Tags

Where a single tag has been lost, a custom made tag can be ordered to replace the lost tag and bearing the same number as the one remaining tag on the animal. Alternatively, the sheep can be re-tagged with a standard new EID set. (If you opt to re-tag with a new set and the remaining tag is the electronic tag, it must be removed) This is acceptable if the animal was born on your own farm. It is also acceptable for bought in animals, if the old number is known. The new tag number can then be correlated to the old number in the flock register. If the old number is not known and you do not know the farm of origin of the animal, a special set of tags, red in color, must be ordered from your tag supplier. Animals bearing these red tags may remain on your farm as long as you wish. (According to current rules, when they are finally sold they may only be sold through a slaughter abattoir. However, this rule may be changed allowing you sell these sheep wherever suits you.)

This article was compiled following considerable consultation with Mr. Dave Caldwell and Mr. Noel Holleran, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food.