

How to Reduce Ear Tagging Complications

Identification ear tags have been used for decades, but the scrapie program occasionally receives concerns from producers about ear tags that have been torn out or are infected at the insertion site. There are many factors which may contribute to infections or ear tears, such as applying tags under unsanitary conditions or improper placement of tags which increase the chance of a tag catching on fences, feed troughs, wire, netting, or other environmental hazard. Proper placement of the ear tag and removal or modification of these hazards may help reduce damage to the ear.

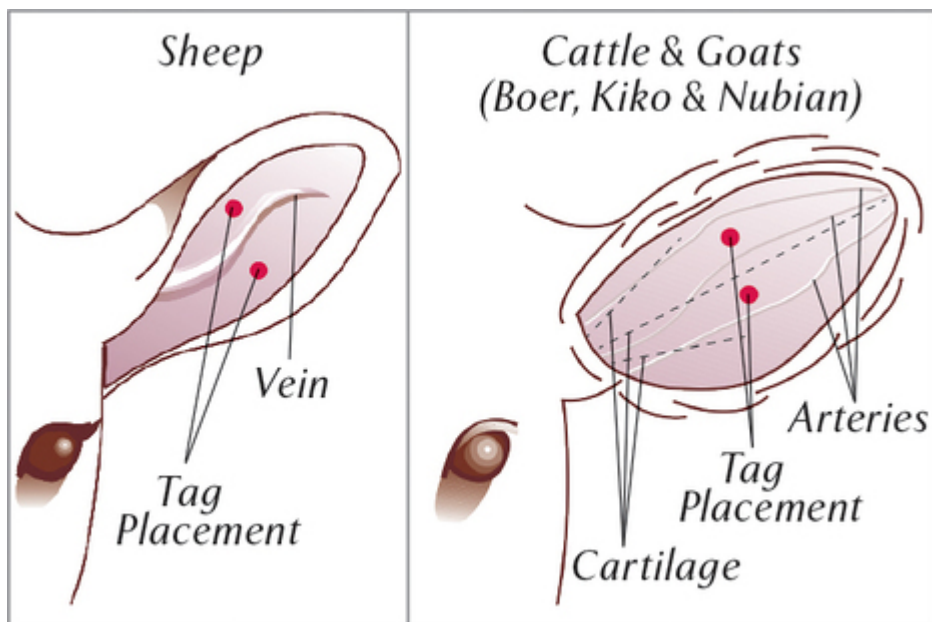
Most ear tag manufacturers have proprietary tag applicators that must be used to apply their tags appropriately and ensure retention. In addition, manufacturers generally recommend an ideal location on the ear, depending on the tag type, species, age of animal (allow room for growth in lambs/kids), and specific breed's ear characteristics. Following these guidelines will also help to reduce potential injury to shearers (see examples below).

Official eartags are those tags which have a US shield, and have met rigorous retention criteria. Additionally, these tags are tamper-evident or tamper-resistant, so they cannot be readily removed from one animal's ear and placed in that of another. The tag numbers are also logged in a national database to ensure that duplicate numbers cannot be issued and are unique for each animal.

If the official ear tags provided by the USDA at no cost do not meet your needs, you can purchase other official tags for identification of your animals. A list of approved ID manufacturers can be found on our webpage at:

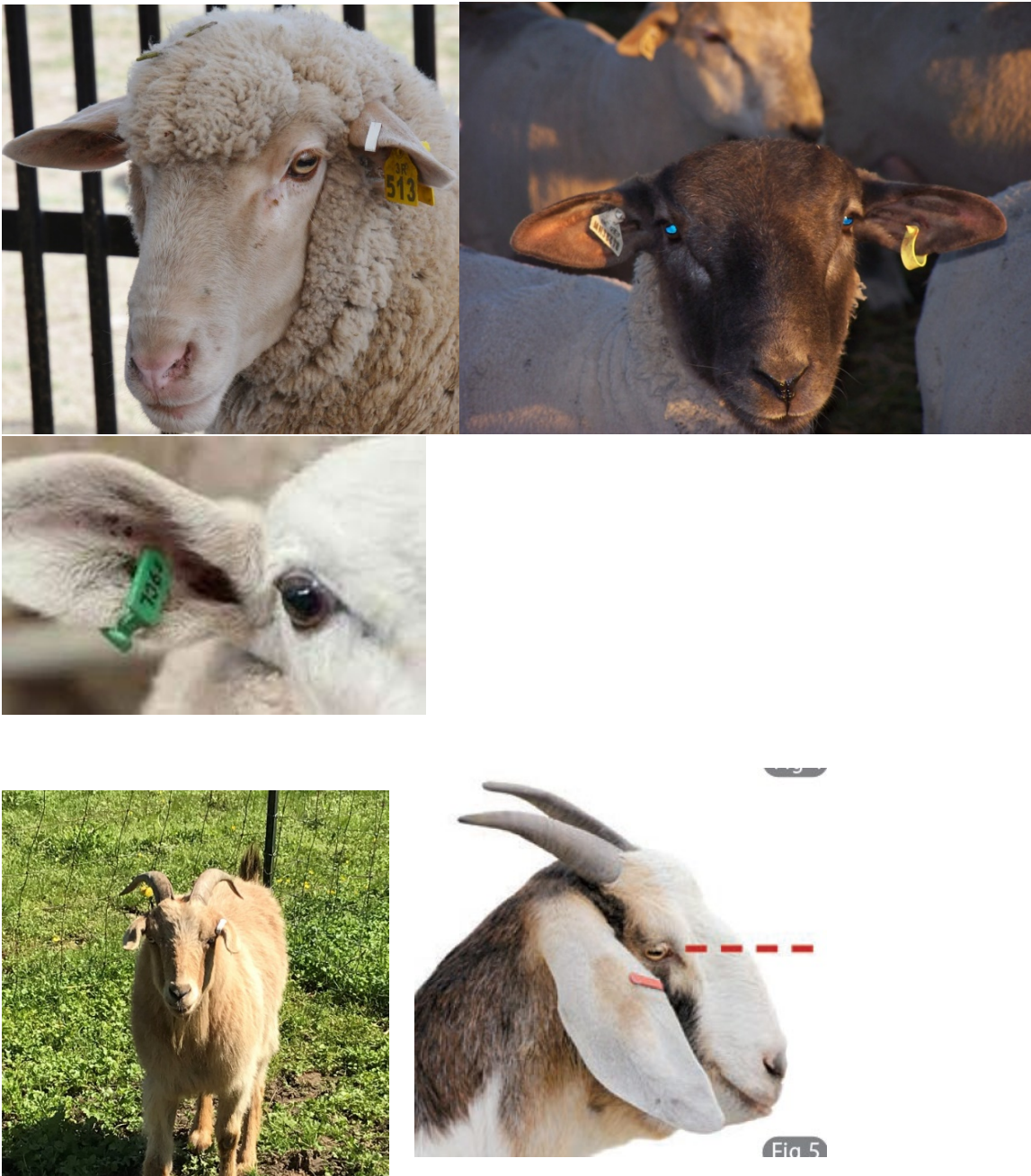
https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/sa_animal_disease_information/sheep-goat/id

Plastic flap or button type ear tags:



One Piece Metal or Plastic Ear tags:

If using a one-piece ear tag such as the metal tags from National Band and Tag or the plastic Shearwell tags, ensure the ear tag is placed about a third to one half of the way down the ear and avoiding the blood vessels as shown above. Make sure the tags are not so loose that the tag is easily caught on hazards and that the fold is not too tight against the ear to cause pressure or rubbing injury. In young growing animals leave enough room to allow for growth. If applying a metal tag to a wool animal apply it to the bottom edge of the left ear a third to half way from the base to reduce the risk of hitting the tag with the clipper blades to prevent injury to shearers.



Summary of methods used to reduce potential of ear infection include:

1. Proper placement and application of the tag in the correct location on the ear while making sure the tag is properly locked in place and not too loose, too tight, or applied with too much force creating pressure sores.
2. Use the applicator designed to be used with the tag. A pair of hardware pliers is not an appropriate applicator for metal tags.
3. Consider the type of tag you select. Larger tags and metal tags tend to have more issues.
4. Clean and disinfect the ear, applicator, and tag before applying ear tags to minimize infection risk.
5. When possible, do not apply tags during the fly season. If this is not possible clean the ear of any blood from applying the ear tag to make it less attractive to flies and apply a food-animal approved fly repellent.
6. Do not apply tags when the animal is wet or likely to get wet.
7. Consult your veterinarian if infection occurs or to determine if applying an approved antibiotic topically may be helpful in your situation

Note: Educational materials on ear tagging and an excellent presentation created by the National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA) can be found on the USDA webpage at: [Sheep and Goat Educational Materials](#)