

# Points of View

A forum for sharing perspectives from across the Canadian Sheep Industry



CANADIAN SHEEP FEDERATION

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## **Myth:** Some producers feel it is acceptable to use beef cattle ID tags in sheep.

The fact is that beef cattle tags are not approved for use in sheep. The Allflex button tags for beef and sheep are not the same. The sheep version is slightly smaller in size and is coded with an identification number specific to sheep.

**Each species covered under Part XV of the Health of Animals Regulations is given a different numbering sequence, specific to that species.**

If producers use a beef tag in sheep, the animal is assumed to be beef in the Canadian Livestock Traceability System (CLTS), the database which houses animal identification numbers. This reduces the credibility of our national ID program, compromises the beef program, and makes traceability impossible should we need to trace for the purposes of a sheep-related disease or issue. Quite simply, sheep carrying beef ear tags would not show up in a traceback for sheep. And, in the event of a beef-related traceback, producers using beef tags in sheep may have to provide proof as to why a beef tag traces to their farm, but was not in a beef animal.

Many producers feel that buying beef cattle tags and using them in sheep is a way to avoid paying a check-off in some provinces. **However, using a beef tag in sheep could potentially result in significant monetary penalties. This practice could cost producers \$1,300 for each infraction, should they be caught.**

At CSF, we continue to work with stakeholders to create a credible system that meets the needs of both government and industry. Your continuing input is very much appreciated.

Please send your comments to [pointsofview@cansheep.ca](mailto:pointsofview@cansheep.ca), or contact me directly. I'm looking forward to hearing from you, and sharing your point of view in a future issue.

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P.S. Please turn to pages 4-5 to read about how the identification system works in our case study with Paul Laronde, Tag and Technology Manager with the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA). The CCIA collects all of the traceability data for the sheep industry and is currently responsible for issuing the numbers assigned to CSIP tags.

# Contributions

## Comments in response to use of beef cattle ID tags in sheep (POV, February 2011)

*" Identification number ranges were provided for each species in order to facilitate the control or eradication of species-specific diseases." - Eric Aubin*

### **Eric Aubin**

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

I find the topic of your next issue quite interesting. Identification number ranges were provided for each species in order to facilitate the control or eradication of species-specific diseases. In the event that veterinarians query the history of sheep which were in contact with a diseased sheep, the sheep bearing a tag allocated to another species will fall under the radar.

Sheep bearing cattle tags also goes against the identification/traceability objectives the industry agreed to.

### **Lorna Wall**

Poplarfield, MB

There have been several recent articles published in Manitoba Cooperator on traceability that should be read by producers. The most recent can be found on page 36 of the April 7, 2011 issue – "Auction marts need more information as traceability marches onward." Grainews has also provided coverage lately about traceability and the lack of good practices, ability to actually comply and the fact that now that readers are being used they are finding that the tags sold are not of the standard that we were led to believe.

Another question to consider: why, if cattle producers can purchase one tag or a hundred tags, is this still not acceptable to the sheep tag sales distributors?

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### **Bill Duffield**

Codan Suffolks  
Wyoming, ON

We use the easy tag II from Premier for sheep size 2. I prefer these tags over approved CSIP tags. I operate on different colours per year. Last year was grey, this year tags for ewe lambs are green. They have large numbers starting from 01 to 20 that can be seen from a fair distance. For a flock of 70, I do not need a reader which is very expensive.

Finally, I question why we should be discouraging the use of beef ID tags. A person still will have to put in the RFID tags.

# Letters to the Editor

*"The RFID system may be useful for flocks of 100 or more, but doesn't make economic sense (if you need a scanner) for small farms."* - Peter Stockdale

## Peter Stockdale

I cannot see why the new system of tagging is an improvement on the previous one. It was designed in countries where flocks are larger and producers could afford the scanner. In Canada, sheep farmers generally have smaller flocks with many being in the range of 25 to 50 animals. The use of a dangle tag to allow you to identify animals without having to catch them, and a pink tag to allow disease tracking, was an adequate system. The RFID system may be useful for flocks of 100 or more, but doesn't make economic sense (if you need a scanner) for small farms. Once again it seems to me CFIA is only looking at disease control and not at the way in which this creates more difficulties for the small producer. Again and again it seems to want to drive the small producer out of business. Were small producers included in the public discussions for this change? As a former employee of CFIA in Alberta, my impression is that this was a set up by a committee with little practical experience of sheep management and handling.

## Helmut Lang

BC

Does CSF really believe that all producers use ear tags? Just ask our butcher in the Valley how many of the lambs he loaded on the last shipment had ear tags ... not a single one! He wouldn't get a single lamb in the area otherwise. Increased enforcement is exactly what we need. My colleagues have been waiting for this message.

# How the Canadian Sheep Identification Program Works

Paul Laronde, Tag and Technology Manager with the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA)

Knowing how to properly tag your sheep is one of the critical building blocks in developing a strong traceability system for the industry. Identification starts on the farm and it's vital for producers to know that there are certain tags that must be used and specific requirements that must be met under the mandatory Canadian Sheep Identification Program (CSIP). One of the most important CSIP regulations states that all sheep and lambs must bear an approved CSIP tag before leaving their farm of origin. This means, producers are not permitted to use non-approved sheep tags, nor are they permitted to use tags meant for other species such as cattle.

Paul Laronde, Tag and Technology Manager with the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA), recently sat down with the Canadian Sheep Federation to discuss how the identification system works and the necessity of following program requirements. The CCIA collects all of the traceability data for the sheep industry and is currently responsible for issuing the numbers assigned to CSIP tags.

## Canada's Sheep Identification Program

Canada's mandatory sheep identification program is an industry-led initiative that was implemented in 2004. Its goal is to create a traceback system that will lead to full-scale traceability for the Canadian sheep industry; as well as to increase the capacity to address producer concerns about sheep health, provide valuable management feedback to producers, and meet consumer expectations for quality assurance and food safety. The current system allows for traceback to the farm of origin, but will evolve with the government's announcement to have full traceability to allow for complete traceback from slaughter right back to the birth of the animal, and all stops in between. As mentioned, all sheep and lambs must bear a CSIP-approved tag before leaving their farm of origin. This includes animals leaving temporarily to go to exhibitions,

veterinary clinics, community pastures, etc. It is illegal to transport an untagged animal.

Every province in Canada is participating in the CSIP with the exception of Quebec. Quebec is implementing a system that exceeds the requirements of the CSIP. Quebec currently requires double tagging with the Allflex button tag.

## Developing a Traceback System

There are currently four different types of sheep tags approved for the CSIP and every individual tag bears a unique identification number between 310,000,000 and 319,999,999. "These numbers have been designated to the Canadian sheep industry, therefore, no other species in Canada has access to this sequence," Laronde said.

## CASE STUDY

Each number is unique to that tag, and no other tag is assigned the same identification sequence.

He explained that the sheep numbers are assigned to tag manufacturers and tags are sold through authorized retail stores and other distributors. The distributors keep records of which numbers went to which producers and this information is reported to a central database (Canadian Livestock Tracking System, CLTS) maintained by the CCIA.

The CCIA has the capability to maintain movement and location data from the time an animal leaves the farm to the point of carcass inspection at the packing plant. As soon as an animal dies, whether it's on the farm or at the abattoir, CCIA must be notified.

Although the CCIA has the capability to retire sheep tags in the database, this is currently not happening. Laronde said part of the issue is that not all sheep are tagged with RFID tags so trying to retire non-machine readable tags at the slaughter plants would be time consuming, and potentially fraught with errors. "As the industry moves to mandatory RFID, the system will be put in place for tag retirement," he said.

### How the Database Works

Producers in the CCIA database are not separated by species; rather every producer entered into the database has a unique identifier. This is a set of numbers and letters that has been automatically generated by the system and assigned. "Identifiers are anonymous in the database and there is no way to distinguish the farm or the province in which the producer lives," Laronde said.

Producers determine what information they want listed in the database, but at a minimum, producers input their name, address and telephone number. The database is private,

meaning the government only has access to the information as legislated in the Health of Animals Act.

Information in the database can be used to help the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) deal with an animal disease outbreak, but once again the CFIA must uphold the privacy laws laid out in the Health of Animals Act. The CSF Board of Directors passed a motion for the Executive Director to access the database for the purposes of tracing carcasses condemned or infected with *C. ovis*. *C. ovis* is a serious production-limiting disease for the industry.

### Why Compliance Matters

Laronde said there are technical differences between the tags meant for each species. For example, the number scheme on sheep tags will differ from the number scheme on cattle or bison tags. This is one of the reasons it is important for producers to ensure that sheep tags are the only tags being applied to sheep.

Another reason producers will want to only use sheep tags in sheep is to avoid being fined. Section 175 of the Health of Animals Regulation states that any person who applies a tag meant for a different species is committing a minor violation and can receive an Administrative Monetary Penalty (AMP) of \$1,300 by the CFIA. Finally, compliance is crucial in terms of developing a credible traceability program.

The goal of animal identification is to reduce the impact and control the spread of animal disease, and to provide the assurance of safe food to consumers. Nationwide compliance will help achieve this goal.

## Your feedback is essential!

This forum will only be successful if everyone weighs in with their own perspectives from their place in the industry. Tell us:

- What you think about "Points of View"
- If you had a strong reaction – either good or bad – to the first feature editorial
- If you want to contribute to an upcoming issue
- If you have a topic you'd like to see addressed
- If you have a story that would make a good case study for others to learn from

What's in it for you? Most people don't often get a chance to have their opinion heard. This is yours. Use it to help make an impact on the future of our business. **Send your comments, suggestions and questions to [pointsofview@cansheep.ca](mailto:pointsofview@cansheep.ca) or call CSF at 519-824-6018 or 1-888-684-7739.**

## In the next issue...

**Myth: Sheep producers have good knowledge of their cost of production and use this information to increase profitability.**

In reality, only a small percentage of producers know their full cost of production (COP) and use it effectively to help manage for profitability.

- Do you know your cost of production (COP)?
- How does COP help you manage your operation
- Is it difficult for producers to track and establish their COP
- Would COP industry benchmarks help you be a better manager
- Do you think the CSF should make COP a top priority?

Please send your comments to [pointsofview@cansheep.ca](mailto:pointsofview@cansheep.ca), or contact Barbara Caswell directly at 1-888-684-7739 or [barbara@cansheep.ca](mailto:barbara@cansheep.ca).