



LIVESTOCK TAGS AND ELECTRONIC IDENTIFICATION

The first ear tags used in livestock were made of tin, in 1799 the President of the Royal Society used them to identify a flock of Merino sheep. The flock was established for King George III. After World War II, larger, flag-like plastic tags were developed in the United States. In 1953, the first two part tags were developed.

Livestock identification has both visual and management benefits. By identifying your animals individually with ear tags, you (and others) can more easily determine which animals are which. In addition, being able to track an animal's history and performance helps you determine which ones are performing well.

The continuous need for improvement in management and production practices is contributing to the increasingly popular use of electronic ID/RFID tags in the livestock industry. EID tags are small "button-like" tags that are placed in the ear. Each EID tag has a unique 15-digit number printed on it, and the number can also be read by scanning the tag with an EID reader. These tags are designed to last for the life of the animal.

Using Electronic ID tags has many advantages. One is that it offers *another form of identification* for each animal. Sometimes visual tags get lost, become snagged on a fence, etc, whereas EID tags are small and are designed for high retention rates. Another plus is that an animal can more easily be identified (by scanning the tag with a reader) rather than needing to have the animal be completely still to read a visual tag or tattoo number. Scanning EID tags rather than writing down EID numbers is a tremendous benefit in saving time and minimizing errors. As livestock are being worked or loaded into a trailer, their EID tag can be scanned while they are on the move.

Leading electronic ID readers include a memory capability that allows for storing of scanned electronic ID values that can later be downloaded onto a computer. This feature reduces the need for additional equipment or computer at the pens or working chute just to see the EID number.

After working the livestock, you can download the list of EIDs that were scanned right into the software and even apply events such as medical treatments or update pasture locations for the cattle that were worked.

Being able to quickly generate a list of visual ID entries from the software is also a helpful feature for ranches to implement EID tags. Producers that already have visual IDs for their animals and want to make the downloading of corresponding EID entries much easier can supply the EID manufacturer with a list of visual tags, which the EID vendor then supplies you with a list of EIDs to easily match to your existing visual IDs.

The Kansas State 4-H Department has switched from the plastic flag type ear tags, to the EID tags for the 2013 program year. In order to show livestock at the Kansas State Fair and the Kansas Junior Livestock show, livestock must have the EID tag in place before entry time.

