



A Short Pencil Is Better Than a Long Memory

Recordkeeping and Tagging:
Good Tools for Good Flock
Management



A Short Pencil Is Better Than a Long Memory

- Why should I bother keeping records?
- What stuff should I record?
- What is the best method to use?
- What the heck is scrapie and why should I care?
- Sheep Tagging 101
- I'm all ears



Why should I bother keeping records?

- Manage your breeding plan to maximize your genetics
- Document the history of your flock and the ancestry of each individual sheep
- Track resistance to disease
- Identify good breeders and easy lambers
- Know when to cull

Question: How many of you keep records on your sheep?

{Pick a couple of people with their hands up.} Why do you keep records on your sheep?

Question: How many of you do NOT keep records on your sheep?

{Pick a couple of people with their hands up.} Why don't you keep records on your sheep? {Typical answers will be "Too many sheep to keep track of" or "don't have a form" or "can't be bothered"}

OK. Now let me ask you this: What traits do you look for when you buy a sheep?

{Point to some folks and ask them individually. Typical answers will be coloration, size, health, twinning, testicle size, horns, no horns, etc.}



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Consider this situation:

Mr. Jones wishes to purchase a ram and an unrelated ewe from Mr. Smith to increase his flock size. The sheep he is interested in have the coloring and size that he is looking for. The ram has a nice set of horns on him.

Everything that Mr. Smith told Mr. Jones sure sounds good, so he buys the two sheep. He gets the sheep home and he breeds the ram to his flock of ewes as well as to the ewe that he purchased. Some of the ram lambs that are born later that year have short stumpy horns that never grow to a length that he can sell. His ewes had lambs with white polka-dots, and the ewe that he purchased with the ram—well, she only had one lamb and it was stillborn..

What exactly did Mr. Jones buy from Mr. Smith? The point is, HE DIDN'T KNOW.



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Had Mr. Smith been able to show Mr. Jones the sheeps' records and the records of the sheeps' sire and dam, and the grandparents, and the birthing records, and medical records, THEN MR. JONES MIGHT HAVE HAD ENOUGH INFORMATION TO MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION to purchase those sheep. Without seeing those records, he was buying hidden genetics that he could not predict and, therefore, could not control. I don't think a single one of you in this room would buy a car based on its color and what the used car salesman told you about it being owned by a little old lady who only drove it a block to the store and back every week. Each of you wants to know the history of the car, its service records, etc. Why would you ask for any less information about a sheep?



Why should I bother keeping records?

Records Help You Make Good Decisions

Without records, we have only visual appraisal and our memory to assist us. Records are a personal thing. By that I mean each producer can record as much or as little as they wish about their sheep. The key to records is to use them to help you make decisions—decisions about which ewe lambs to choose as replacements; about which ewes to mate with which rams; about which sheep to sell as breeding stock; about which sheep to sell as freezer lamb. Record what is important to you or what you will use. A lambing or barn record is a place to begin. Let's take a look at what needs to go into a record keeping program.



What stuff should I record?

- Birth Record Form
- Event Report
- Flock Record

I'm going to show you the two main documents that I use in my flock book. A little later, I'll discuss how Mary Swindell's system differs a little, and we'll talk about how the rest of you keep your records. There isn't one best way; you need to develop something that works for you and is easy to maintain.



Birth Record Form

Ear tag	Name	Registration No	Gender	Polled/Horned	DOB	Time of Birth	Weight	Litter	Birthing Notes
001	Yvonne	CJEO290105	Ewe	(Polled)	01-Feb-98				
002	Jimmy		Weth	Horned	29-Jul-97				
003	Zane	CJEO299246P	Ram	Polled	16-Feb-99		5.5	Single	
004	Sarah	CJEO199374	Ewe	(Horned)	29-Jan-99	5:00 AM	7.5	Single	

Photo	Sire	Dam	Paternal Grand sire	Paternal Grand dam	Maternal Grand sire	Maternal Grand dam
syPhoto Photograph	Goliath	not registered	Sir Walter	NCU-01-221	not registered	not registered
syPhoto Photograph	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
syPhoto Photograph	Eric EDS019	Yvonne CJEO2	Sir Walter	NCSU 95-77	Goliath	not registered
syPhoto Photograph	Eric EDS019	Charlene CJEO	Sir Walter	NCSU 95-77	Justin CRB0496106H	April (not registered)

Purchased From	Sold To	Disposition
Beam		Flock Member
Matlock		Flock Member
Born on Farm		Flock Member
Born on Farm	Young	Sold

When a new lamb is born on my farm, as soon as I come in from the barn, I record the event on this form—the Birth Record. {show slide of Birth Record and review all fields.}



Event Record

Eartag # 001

Yvonne

Record of Events

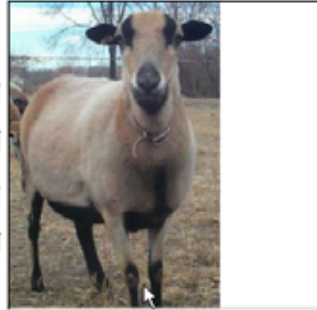
22-Sep-98	Bred by Eric
06-Nov-98	Ivonec; Probios
08-Nov-98	Purchased from Charles Bean, 18412 E. Indian Hill Road, Newalls, OK 74851; he delivered
24-Jan-99	CD&T
16-Jul-99	Saw Zane mount Yvonne several times
12-Dec-99	Birthing twin ram lambs, #103 and #104.
19-Jan-00	Obviously in heat; Zachary following her around.
19-Jun-00	Birthing twin ram lambs; one failed to break sack and I found him dead. Remaining lamb is #114.
01-Aug-00	3cc abortifacient (Lutalyse)
19-Nov-00	Put Zachary w/Yvonne and Sarah. Due soon after April 20, 2001
26-Dec-00	Pulled Zachary from ewes.
25-Apr-01	Birthing twin ram lambs. Full breech on 2nd lamb; 15 minutes to reposition; born dead. Fully formed, but only about 2.5 lb. First lamb has white spots on back and white crown. Tagged #120
09-Jun-01	Put Zachary in to breed
24-Sep-01	Pulled Zachary from ewes.
28-Nov-01	Birthing twin lambs, #129 and #130

As the lamb matures, I record weaning date, breeding dates, disposition, birthings, medications, and anything else that happens to that sheep while on my farm. Mary Swindell advocates using a Daily Journal to jot down information that you later transfer to the Event record for that sheep. If you have a short memory, or a lot of sheep, a Daily Journal is an excellent idea, and it also enforces a good discipline by forcing you to be observant and getting you out in the barn each day.

Flock Record (top)

Eartag #:

Registration #:



Birth Record

DOB: Gender: Litter:

Time of birth: Weight at birth: Polled/Horned:

Birthing notes:

Flock Record (bottom)

Record of Events

22-Sep-98	Bred by Eric
06-Nov-98	Ivomec; Probios
08-Nov-98	Purchased from Charles Beam, 18412 E. Indian Hill Road, Newalla, OK 74881; he delivered
24-Jan-99	CD&T
16-Jul-99	Saw Zane mount Yvonne several times
12-Dec-99	Birtherd twin ram lambs, #103 and #104.
19-Jan-00	Obviously in heat; Zachary following her around.
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What is the best method to use?

- Microsoft Excel spreadsheet
- Microsoft Access database
- Hardcopy
- Custom software

- Excel spreadsheet such as the forms that Mary Swindell included in the article she wrote about sheep record keeping in the recent BBSAI newsletter.
- Access database (relational; enter info in one place; use it in several places)
- Hardcopy
- Software programs such as those shown on next page (also CD with Sheep Breeders Notebook on it)
- If you are interested in receiving her Excel database forms, or in receiving my Access database forms, please email me and I will send them to you.



What the heck is scrapie and why should I care?

- Degenerative nerve disease
- Transmitted by placenta and birth fluids from an infected ewe
- Incubation period is typically 2 to 5 years
- Scrapie is *always fatal*; there is no treatment or vaccine

You will have noticed that the one field common to every form you've seen is the sheep's ID number. Prior to 2001, breeders could, if they wanted to, keep detailed flock record of each sheep owned. Now it is the LAW! In 2001, the USDA enacted the Scrapie Eradication

- Scrapie is a degenerative nerve disease
- Sheep that are susceptible to scrapie are typically infected as lambs by coming into contact with infected placenta and birth fluids from an infected ewe.
- The incubation period is typically 2 to 5 years.
- Scrapie is ALWAYS FATAL; there is no treatment or vaccine.
- Rams can get scrapie but do not infect other sheep. Ram genetics, however, can contribute to scrapie susceptibility in their offspring.
- There has been no reported case of scrapie in blackbelly sheep. However, blackbellies are not genetically resistant to scrapie.



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Clinical signs of scrapie

- Changes in behavior
 - **Hypersensitivity to noise or movement**
 - **Scratching and rubbing**
- Neurological behaviors
 - **Loss of coordination**
 - **Lip smacking**
 - **Bunny hopping; walking on eggshells**
- Weight loss
- Weakness; unable to rise
- Death, possibly sudden



What does tagging have to do with eradicating scrapie?

- Scrapie takes a long time to develop symptoms. An infected sheep may be sold several times before symptoms develop.
- To eradicate scrapie, we need an ID system that allows us to trace an infected sheep back to its flock of origin to halt the spread.

What does tagging have to do with eradicating scrapie?

- The disease takes a long time to manifest itself with clinical signs. Until recently there has been no live animal test for the disease, and the new test requires a tissue biopsy instead of a simple blood or urine test.

- To eradicate scrapie, we need an ID system that allows us to trace an infected sheep back to its flock of origin to halt the spread.



How do I comply with the rules?

- ALL blackbelly sheep require scrapie ID (except wethers)
 - All sheep 18 months and older
 - All breeding sheep regardless of age
- Obtain a premises ID number
- Choose what tags you want
 - State vet will provide some kinds free; applicator may not be free
- Tattoos don't work well; trust me

How do I comply with the rules?

- For purposes of blackbelly sheep, the bottom line is that ALL blackbelly sheep require scrapie ID.
 - (1) All sheep 18 months and older.
 - (2) All breeding sheep regardless of age.
 - (3) All sheep for exhibition other than castrated males.
- Obtain a premises ID number from your local APHIS Veterinary Services office.
- Decide which tags will work best for you and order them.
 - (1) Depending on your state regulations, the state may provide up to three different types of tags for FREE.
 - (2) You can custom-order tags, but they will not be free.
 - (3) You may or may not receive the pliers used to apply the tag.
 - (4) We will look at some of those tags and pliers at the end of this workshop. A list of approved tag manufacturers is included in your Welcome packet.
 - (5) I have tattooed my sheep and I do not recommend this because tattoos are not legible on black skin.

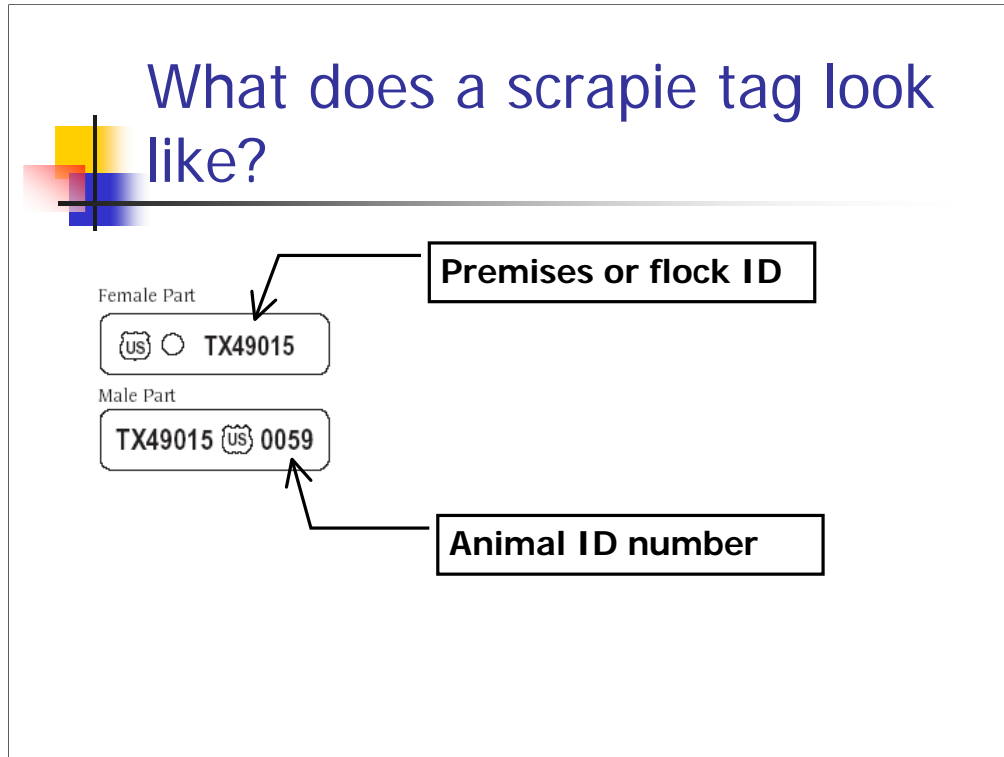


How do I comply with the rules?

- Set up a record keeping system
- Apply the tag before the sheep leaves your farm, or sooner
- Get a health certificate for the sheep being shipped
- n Retain ID records and health records for 5 years

- Set up a system to record the ear tags that you apply.
- Apply the tag before the sheep leaves your farm. You can do it sooner, if you choose.
- Get a health certificate no more than 30 days prior to shipment of a breeding or sexually intact sheep. I take it to mean that you are not legally required to obtain a health certificate for lambs.
- Retain ID records and health records for 5 years, even if the sheep has been slaughtered or has died from other causes.

What does a scrapie tag look like?



What does a scrapie tag look like?

There are two components to the tag: Your premises or flock ID, which is your state's postal abbreviation followed by a two- to five-digit number; and an animal ID number. This number can be either an arbitrary sequential number or an individual animal identification number that you can choose. The important thing is that each number is unique and can only be used for THAT animal.

Sheep Tagging 101

- A sheep must be tagged with a permanent, unique ID, preferably from birth
- Sheep tags are too big for blackbelly lamb ears



In this workshop, we've discussed the reasons for keeping good records, how to keep good records, and why the government now requires you to keep good records. At the heart of your record keeping system is the individual tag that you apply to your sheep and that he wears for his entire life.

There is no single tag that will work well for blackbelly sheep from birth to death. The approved scrapie ID tags are too large to fit in the ear of newly born lambs. Most of the other tags rip out. The ewe in this slide was tagged with my USDA-approved scrapie tag when she was a week old and it ripped her clear down to the base.

Sheep Tagging 101

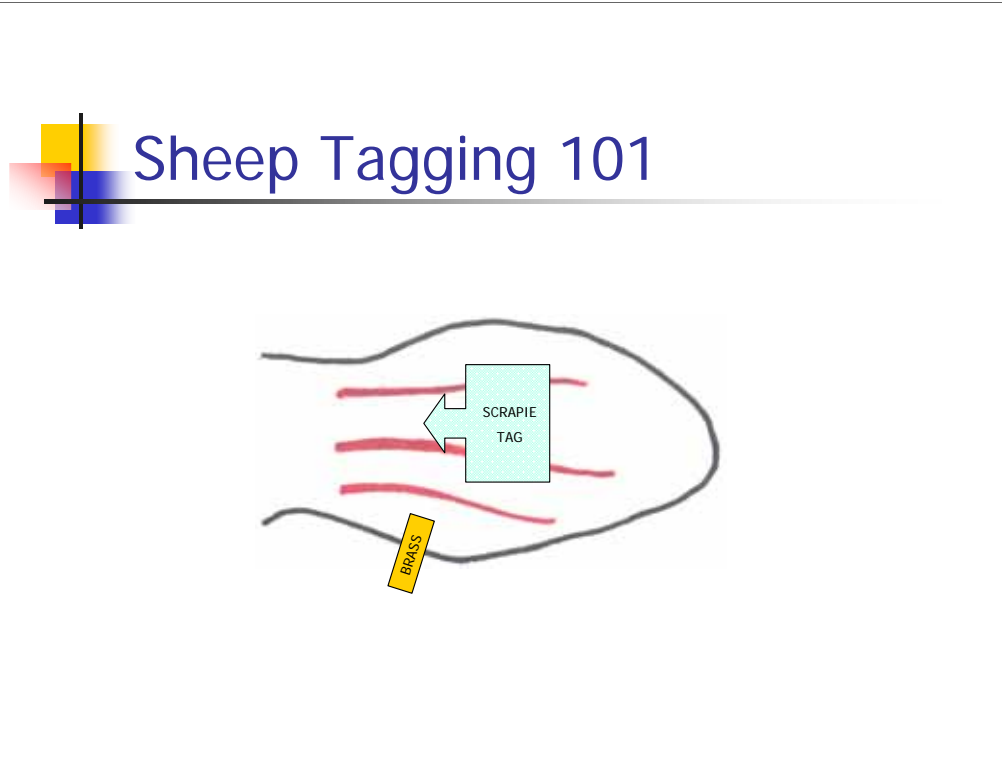
- A good option is a brass→plastic dual-tagging plan



I use a two-tag method that works extremely well for me.

- 1) At 2 days of age, I tag a lamb using a small brass tag I purchase from Premier. The tag bears the individual number of that sheep. The tag is not easy to read, but I have never had one rip out. It is a reliable method to ensure that a sheep and its number are never parted.
- 2) When a sheep leaves my property, whether to slaughter or for sale to another breeder, I apply the USDA-approved scrapie ID tag. The tag I choose to use is Premier's 2X tag. One side it bears my farm ID and on the other side it bears the same number as the brass tag—the sheep's unique individual number.

Talk to other breeders at this event and learn what system works best for them and why. This will help you choose the best method for your farm.



- It is very important that you apply the tag to the area on the ear between the blood veins. If you hit a vein, it will hurt the sheep and bleed a lot.
- A brass tag or other tag that wraps around the edge of the ear must allow room for growth. Therefore, you should place it so that about half of the tag hands off the bottom edge of the ear.
- A button tag or Premier's 2X tag should be placed in the center of the ea, between the veins, about a third of the way down the ear (starting from the head).
- I have placed a number of different tags and applicators on the table, along with some cardboard ears. I invite you to experiment with the tags and applicators and practice inserting the tag in the correct location on the ear. Please help yourself to the catalogs and information that the vendors have provided.