

## EAR TAGGING OF SHEEP AND GOATS CONSULTATION

### A RESPONSE FROM THE GOAT VETERINARY SOCIETY

The Goat Veterinary Society has consulted with its membership, and from a useful numbers of replies it is plain that opinions are divided.

There are many different breeds and cross-breeds of goats, kept under many different conditions.. Some seem to tolerate having two tags in their ears perfectly well, and others seem to be in trouble with one tag, never mind two. These seem to be goats that have particularly thin ears. Tagging these goats causes a haematoma, a blood blister, to form at the site, however carefully the tag is inserted, and this heals to form a fibrous reaction which in itself makes the ear distorted and painful. The tendency of these haematomas to become infected can make things many times worse.

Tattooing avoids this trauma and many goatkeepers would prefer to retain it as an option as it is also tamperproof by comparison to the use of plastic ear tags which are easily cut out as well as easily torn out.

Goats that are kept outside, particularly where they have access to scrubland type grazing, -which is what they evolved for! - tend to lose a lot more tags of any type than those kept indoors, often by the tag catching on say a thorn bush and ripping straight out of the ear.

At the other end of the scale one of our major dairy goat farmers commented that he always tagged his kids with two tags when they were young and never had any bother, though he was concerned that if EID ever did come in, then the extra weight he presumed would be in the tag concerned could cause difficulties in young kids. To wait until 6 months before putting the second tag in was to him a labour intensive policy that was better avoided.

There is a consensus that in breeds which do not tolerate tags well, they are tolerated a lot better at nine months than at six months, and better still at 12 months.

The news that pastern tags will be acceptable was welcomed, but there is a problem in that we cannot be certain when the pastern stops expanding. However it may be that pastern tags fitted before 12 months of age might become too tight as the animal grows. That would certainly be the case at six months.

Goatkeepers are concerned that once again, goats are being treated as sheep for politically convenient administrative reasons, and there is considerable feeling that dual identification is a duplication that is not needed in the industry as movements of goats from farm to farm are small in number by comparison to those of sheep, and goats are rarely traded through a

livestock market, most movements being directly from farm to farm.

The derogation from the need to use EID is welcomed by most if not all small-scale breeders. Many large-scale breeders already use EID for management purposes and some of these are mounted in pastern tags which are fitted when the doe enters the herd, which would be at just over a year old. We foresee a situation where the management tag will also become the "Official" tag.

There is considerable interest in the principle of implanting microchips rather than mounting them in tags of any sort. Current evidence is that if implanted at the base of the ear or at the base of the tail, they do not migrate, and many people see this procedure as being preferable to double tagging. It is worth pointing out that, as from next month, ALL horses and ponies will by EU law have to be microchipped. Under EU law, those said horses are all classed as meat animals. It therefore seems rather absurd that there are restrictions on the use of microchips in goats that might be eaten, though we would assume that there needs to be an agreed site of implantation to enable the chips to be discarded at slaughter.

A frequent comment has been that where goats are selected for meat, those destined for slaughter are often not selected out from those destined for breeding, until after one year of age, so that the derogation for single tagging those going to slaughter is of little value in a species which grows more slowly than do sheep. There is little saving in cost in waiting to apply a second tag, the recurring theme throughout all the replies we have received is that where it is desirable to delay inserting a second tag, it is for reasons of WELFARE rather than cost. If we must have double tagging, it is cheaper to buy them as a pair in whatever form than to get extras made "Later" for those to be retained on farm, which is an expensive business.

A similar recurring theme has been why do we need to put a second tag in until or unless the animal leaves the farm?. That tends to be from small producers and hobby farmers.

**WELFARE** has in fact been a constant theme of replies, and there is a feeling that this is the most serious among several areas where applying rules intended for sheep are going to cause practical problems in goats.

In summary:

The goat has different characteristics of ear structure from sheep, which in many breeds makes them less able to tolerate ear tags. Using two ear tags can thus be a welfare problem

The allowing of the use of pastern tags is warmly welcomed, but is not possible in goats as young as six months as continued growth of the leg will cause a welfare problem, and untightening these tags is not possible.

The far smaller numbers of movements made by goats, particularly young ones, has not been taken into account when the rules were drawn up at EU level, neither has the fact that other than a small number of kids sold when young to specialist rearers, or to rear as pets, it is comparatively rare for goats under 12 months to move from one farm to another. In particular there is not, as happens with sheep, regular movement from farm to farm to seek out the best available grazing. The tracability problems which occurred in sheep in 2001, would be unlikely to happen in goats.

We recommend that most of these problems could be overcome by a derogation allowing that goats need not have a second tag of whatever sort applied until 12 months of age, that being a sensible age at which any welfare problems would be unlikely to get less by waiting for longer.

EID implantation would be welcomed by many, and we look forward to the results of various trials currently in hand to test the viability of the system.

We thus feel that in assuming that goats are the same as sheep, The EU have in effect failed to recognise that there are differences of anatomy and growth rate which make the timing of secondary I/d application as applied to sheep, inappropriate for goats, and that differences of management, and in particular, frequency of farm to farm movement, also make the rules as applied to sheep, somewhat overarching when applied to goats. In particular, if the goat industry is to implement the regulations as currently planned, it will cause serious welfare issues. For a Government who have claimed that Britain Leads the World in animal Welfare, the effect of the regulations without alteration to adapt to the needs of the species, could be embarrassing!!.

We recommend that the Government should seek in particular, suitable derogations to enable the application of secondary I/d tags to take place at any time up to 12 months, and not 6 or 9 months as at present, and reconsider tattooing as a method of identification.

We further recommend that electronic I/D via microchipping should be permissible in goats, though not mandatory, as it is considered by many to be much more welfare acceptable than the alternatives.

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veterinary Society.**