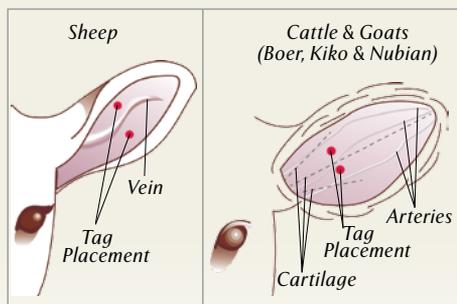


# Ear Tag FAQs



## Q. How can I reduce tag losses?

### 1. Don't place tags close to the skull. Doing so will increase both infection and losses. Why?

- The tissue may become too thick for the space between male and female tag parts.
- The wound is less able to heal (not enough air). Try to insert tags midway between the skull and the outer end of the ear. *Note: One-piece loop tags for sheep/goats only fit in the lower red spot (above).*

### 2. Avoid the large veins in the ear (see diagram above).

**Why?** Tissue around damaged veins heals slowly—so prone to infection.

**3. Don't use cheaper tags as long-term tags. Why?** They're often made of cheaper plastic that may become brittle from UV light.

**4. Avoid double-button round tags. Why?** More likely to snag and rip free on grass, vines, fences and feeders.

**5. Avoid low-fiber diets. Why?** Sheep on these diets are desperate to chew on anything. When one lamb starts chewing tags, its pen-mates will copy the behavior.

## Q. How do I keep track of an animal if a tag falls out?

- Install 2 tags (one per ear)—with the same number. Official tags can't be duplicated—but you can use the same individual animal number on the second tag *if you don't add a flock or premise number.*
- Tattoo the animal. No animal ID is more permanent.

## Q. How long does it take to get ear tags from Premier?

**A.** Usually requires less than 2 business days for us to print and ship them. Then it's up to the delivery service.

## Q. What tag colors imprint the best—and the worst?

- A.**
- Light colors (white, yellow, salmon, spearmint) are the most readable.
  - Dark colors (red, purple, green) are the least readable.

## Q. What tag system do we use?

1. Tag baby lambs with 2 size 1.2 or 1.5 Q-flex tags (same numbers for each tag) within 4 weeks of lambing. We select tag color, numbers, placement to indicate twin-single-triplet/year of birth/sex (see information below).
2. For breeding sheep we replace the size 1.2 with a size 5 Q-flex tag (much easier to see). *The original tag hole is reused for this.*
3. *We rarely install official scrapie tags until the animal is ready to leave the farm—and when we do we put them in the holes left by the tag we removed.*  
Why? No stress. No risk of bleeding or infection. And the healed scar tissue ensures the tag will stay for a long time.

# How ear tags can help you...

## 1. To indicate sex

### Benefit:

1. Allows rapid sorting by sex while sheep and goats are moving down a chute or in a holding pen.
2. No need to spend valuable time to "check the plumbing" of each animal. Keeps your hands clean!

### To do this:

- Males: Insert the primary tag in left ear.
- Females: Insert the primary tag in right ear.

## 2. To indicate year of birth

### Benefit:

No need to catch them to check teeth. A tag can tell you the age from 25 ft away. Faster decisions when sorting for culling or breeding.

### Two ways to do this (we do both):

- a. Use a different color for each year.
- b. Begin tag number series with the year of birth. Example—tag 15275 indicates lamb is the 275th lamb tagged in 2015.

## 3. To indicate sire (and dam)

### Benefit:

No need to check records.

### Three ways to do this:

- a. Use a different color second tag for each sire (blue tags = Sire XYZ; purple tags = Sire ABC).
- b. Have sire name printed on the tag of its progeny.
- c. Handwrite the ewe's tag number with a marking pen on the lamb's tag. If space is limited write it on the inner surfaces of the tag.

*Note: Since tags can be lost, we strongly advise using 2 sire/dam tags (one in each ear).*

## 4. To indicate problems

### Benefit:

Allows rapid, positive culling of animals with foot problems, dystocia, mastitis, prolapse, etc.

### Two ways to do this:

- a. Put a tag that says "cull" (or a black tag) into problem animals.
- b. Use an ear notcher to mark the animal for culling.

## 5. To indicate single, twin or triplet

### Benefit:

Speeds up sorting for breeding and sale purposes. Reduces need to consult records.

### To do this:

Use a different color for each lamb type. Repeat these colors every year.

### Premier's code is:

- blue = single
- green = twin
- orange = triplet

Identical to plan when marking ewes or lambs with Sprayline.

**Premier Tip:** *If you use tags in your breeding flock, it's wise to install a tag in both ears when they are baby lambs.*

*Why? Because tag wounds in lambs heal quickly with less infection risk than tag wounds in adult animals—and thus provides a pre-existing, clean, firm hole when a larger tag needs to be installed.*

# Infections from tagging sheep...

## Causes, Factors & Solutions



A good result.



An infected ear.



And another...

*We apologize if the above photos are disturbing. However, they are real. By showing them we hope to encourage shepherds to reduce the risk of infection.*



### Option 1

*Our preferred solution. We use a Chloradine™ dilution in a spray bottle for the antiseptic and follow with fly repellent, Catron™ IV.*



### Option 2

*Spray a mixture of Triiodine-7 and Pine Tar between the tag and ear to repel flies and disinfect the wound. Note: Iodine and Pine Tar leave a dark stain on tags.*



### Option 3

*Apply SuperLube antibiotic gel to the tag before insertion. It contains chlorhexidine—which acts by killing many of the microorganisms present.*

#### **Q. How can I reduce the risk of infected ears from tagging?**

- A.**
1. Tag them as lambs or kids.
  2. Don't insert tags in "fly/gnat seasons."
  3. If you live in a humid climate, tag in the winter.
  4. Don't place tags close to the skull.
  5. Tag when the ear is dry and clean.
  6. Use smaller tags.
  7. Avoid metal or round tags.
  8. Apply an antibiotic, a fly repellent or a disinfectant to the ear tissue or tag (Options 1-3 above).

#### **Q. The risk—how serious is it?**

- A.** Can be very serious. If not "caught" quickly it can disfigure a sheep for life. May force it to be culled early.

#### **Q. How often does it occur?**

- A.** Seldom in dry areas and seasons. Too often in humid months.

#### **Q. Have we had tags cause infection at Premier?**

- A.** Mild infections in the week after tagging is more common than most think. But you have to look closely to see it. It usually heals on its own. However, serious infections have occurred here in 2 instances:
- a. In July 2003, after inserting 5 brands of RFID tags in adult sheep.
  - b. In 2008, during a trial with 2 different tags inserted in 400 adults and feeder lambs in a humid May and June. Lambs were

minimally affected. Adults were badly affected. Both groups were on grass.

*Common factors: Adult sheep and SE Iowa's summer heat and humidity.*

#### **Q. Does the brand of tag matter?**

- A.** Not if the tag design is similar. At a major sheep show we observed mild infection with most tag brands.

#### **Q. Does tag type (metal vs round vs leaf/flag-shaped) make a difference?**

- A.** All things being equal (but they rarely are), designs that allow more air near the wound will produce less infection. That's why we avoid round and metal tags when it's possible to do so.