

National Animal Identification Program Requirements for Goats - Mar 2005

Goat producers should have received a letter in 2002 from USDA explaining the mandatory identification now required for goats in the US. In 2002 this info was being required to try to track a disease called Scrapie. However, with the occurrence of other important diseases with an impact on human health such as mad cow in cattle and chronic wasting disease in farmed deer, the USDA is now committed to having a National Animal Identification Program to track all livestock that may enter the food chain. If you have questions after reading over this article, please contact Ms. Anna Moore at the USDA Veterinary Services New York Office 518-858-1424 or 518-869-9007. If you live out of state, call 1(866)873-2824 to reach the USDA office in your state.

From now on all breeding goats (even doe and buck kids) and goats sold as pets will require official identification upon change of ownership. If the animal is registered with a breed registry (does not need to be ADGA, can be IBGA, ABGA, etc.), the official identification will be considered their tattoo numbers for that registry as long as they are accompanied off farm by their registration papers and have a legible tattoo that matches their registration papers.

If the goat is not accompanied by a registration paper, then a tattoo can only be used as a form of USDA official identification if the USDA assigned premises identification number is tattooed in one ear and a unique individual animal ID is tattooed in the other ear. A unique individual animal identifier could be a specific letter that represents the year of the goat's birth followed by a unique number to distinguish the goat from other herdmates born the same year. For example, you might give the fifteenth kid born in 2005 the letter T and the number 15. If some of your herd is registered with a breed association but the rest of your animals are not (for example, your slaughter goats would not be registered), you can check with USDA to see if they can assign you a premises identification number that is just your registry herd code with the addition of your state prefix in front of it. The state prefix for farms in New York is NY, for Pennsylvania it's PA, etc. Any animal may be tattooed instead of tagged if the above points are followed **AS LONG AS THE TATTOO IS LEGIBLE**. However, keep in mind that adding NY to your premise number may result in too many tattoo digits to fit easily into your goat's right ear for a herd code.

If you are not affiliated with a breed association or foresee situations where your animals would not have their registration papers with them or just plain don't want to worry about whether tattoos are legible, you need to request a premises identification number (also referred to as premise code, flock number, etc) and an order of official USDA eartags from Anna Moore at USDA Vet Services (518) 869-9007. Keep in mind that if your farm is registered with a breed association you can report what your herd code is and request that USDA use this same code. This way you will receive eartag letters to use on unregistered animals that match the ones you use for tattoos on your registered animals to make your bookkeeping a little easier. The New York USDA Veterinary Services Office reports that they are honoring these requests on a first come, first serve basis. For example, it may be that a member of the American Boer Goat Association and a member of the American Dairy Goat Association both happen to reside in NY State and have identical herd codes registered with the two different registries. In that case, whichever one of you requests the herd code first will get it, regardless of your breed affiliation. The official herd code for eartag purposes will have the state postal code (i.e., NY) stamped in front of the code so there is no problem if you have duplicate herd codes but live in different states.

You can choose between metal eartags or plastic eartags. These tags will be free for your first year (2005) so it's recommended that you order enough for two to three years. The official tags have a premise number to identify your herd and then a 4 or 5 digit number to identify the individual animal. Several tag manufacturers have gotten approval to market official tags. Some of the companies that have already gotten approval include Hasco Tag (859-261-6000), Premier Sheep (800-282-6631), and

National Brand & Tag (606-261-2035). If you opt to order the tags from a private company rather than USDA, the tags will not be free but you may be able to choose colors or designs you prefer.

So who in your herd needs to be officially identified? Initially all castrated male goats regardless of age were exempt. This is no longer true. Essentially all mature goats moving interstate need to be officially identified. **If you are taking the goat to a local livestock auction, this is considered interstate transport by both NY Ag & Markets and USDA.** This is because auctions accept consignments from other states without health papers. Keep in mind that if you are taking a registered animal to a local auction without including her registration papers in the sale, she will need an official identification beyond just her tattoos. Any goat going to a county or state fair is required to be USDA officially identified. In addition, any goat that is going to a private show or sale, where out of state sheep or goats will also be attending, must be USDA officially identified. Please remember all goats sold for breeding or as pets require USDA official identification upon change of ownership.

But what about your younger animals? Technically they are exempt if going to slaughter. However, the catch is that you still need to verify that it went for slaughter and not for breeding purposes. In truth, the responsibility for this passes to the dealer or livestock market you send the goat through. The dealer or auction has no way of verifying that the goat was sold for slaughter so they will be treating all goats alike. Many markets will now require that you place USDA official ID on the animal prior to arriving at the market and provide them with your name, and address and telephone number if known. If the animal was not born in your herd and is born after January 1, 2002, they will also need the premise code for the herd of birth or name and address of that herd. If goats that have not been USDA officially identified are delivered to a market, the market can tag the goat with official USDA serial number tags and advise the owner, dealer or trucker of scrapie eradication regulations. USDA, while performing their routine inspections, will be observing dock-in procedures. USDA will document any instances of non-compliance by owners, dealers and truckers of goats and sheep. To make things easier, USDA has available an official tag similar to the others that is colored blue and says "MEAT" on it. Animals with these tags could not be diverted to breeding. These tags are available in metal only and can be ordered.

As well as officially identifying your goats, you also have another major responsibility. Because Scrapie can incubate as long as 5 years, you need to keep records for all goats that move to and from your farm for at least 5 years after they leave your farm. Records need to include their official identification number, sex, breed, date of birth, dates of transfers, and name and address for their origin and destination. If the animal was born after January 1, 2002, you need to keep records on the name, address and premise code of the farm they were born at. These records can not just be in your head. They need to be recorded in writing in a notebook or on your computer.

You may decide to tag all goats in your herd with official eartags to make it easier for you and any buyers you sell to keep track of your animals. At any rate, I wish you all luck with the process and hope this explanation has not confused you even more. More information on Scrapie, the Scrapie Eradication program, and the National Animal Identification Program is available on the web at <http://www.animalagriculture.org/scrapie/Scrapie.htm>, <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/naahps/scrapie/> and <http://www.usda.gov/nais> .

Sincerely,

Dr. tatiana Luisa Stanton
(Chairperson ESMGPA Educational Committee)