



# Icelandic Sheep Breeders of North America

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## Tattooing and Ear Tagging Your Sheep

From conversations on the elist

Priscilla Meinholz wrote: The Canadian Livestock Records Corporation (CLRC) states that “the registered identification letters (flock I.D.) of the owner of the lamb at birth, are to be tattooed in the lamb’s right ear within 100 days of birth. (These identification letters or “flock code” must be applied for and approved through CLRC). All lambs also must be tattooed in their left ear with a different number, followed by the designation “year letter” used to signify the year of birth. (The year 1999 was letter “J” - 2000 was letter “K” and so on). Please note: The letters “I” “O” “Q” and “V” are not used). We find tattooing to be a messy job, with us ending up being nearly as green as the sheep. This is definitely a job for your oldest clothes, and a two-person effort.

For best results, the ear should be cleaned with rubbing alcohol prior to tattooing, and then dried. (We use 3/8” tattoo digits). Apply green tattoo paste to the ear (we use an old toothbrush), squeeze the ear between tattoo tongs (ideally small holes will be made with no bleeding - make sure to try to miss the veins in the ears), and then immediately rub additional green paste over the area with either a finger or a toothbrush.

Here at our farm we use Allflex sheep ear tags in addition to tattooing. We use the ear tags so we can easily identify each animal from a distance. The ear tag must be attached as close to the base of the ear (near the head) as possible in order that there be sufficient room for the required tattoo. Tattooing supplies and ear tags can be ordered from many sources.

Stefania Dignum wrote: For years now I have used small aluminum tags that I get from Livestock Records in Ottawa (CLRC). These are called lambtags and I put them on the lamb before they get out of the lambing pen - that is before they are 3 days old. If put fairly close to the head, these stay in quite well. Drawback: these tags cannot be read from a distance. In numbering your lambs, you don’t have to start every year with 001. You can start with any number as long as that number is used only once a year. Because these tags are small, they can grow into the ear. That can be avoided by putting the tag near the edge of the ear. They are small and so are the pliers that are used to put them into the ear. They are light weight and do not get snagged on things like the big tags.

Another way that I have used to identify horned ewes from a distance is to brand the ID number into the horn. I use an electric wood burning tool. This kind of I.D. can be read from a distance but will gradually wear off as the sheep gets older.

**\*\*\*NOTE:** Since this article was written, tagging requirements have changed to reflect the scrapie programs now in place that affect livestock. All livestock that are moved must be identified with an approved tag with the flock’s “Scrapie I.D.” - for more information about the scrapie program, please visit this website: [www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/nahps/scrapie](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/nahps/scrapie)

