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On-farm Benefits of Sheep Electronic Identification (EID)

A Sheep Electronic Identification (EID) system uses an electronic ear tag or device, marking each animal with its own, individual identifying number. There are many potential flock and cost management benefits of EID for producers to utilise on the farm.

Accurate identification of sheep

The EID tag or device contains a microchip that can be read electronically in a fraction of a second by producers who have a suitable reader (panel or handheld). With electronic reading, transcription errors can be eliminated saving both time and labour in the yards whilst increasing the accuracy of your information.

There is also the option of placing a management tag in the opposite ear of the sheep. This can be printed with a number matching the serial number on the EID tag that has been used. The EID tag can then act as a back up if the management tag is lost, and vice versa.

Individual Animal Management

Individual tagging allows individual identification of animals. Tag reading equipment, scales, automatic drafting systems and computer management software is now available which allows producers to read tags and correlate the identifying number with all relevant information to that animal and its performance. Depending on your own management needs, records could include:

- ✓ Genetics/Bloodlines
- ✓ Breeding history
- ✓ Weight gain
- ✓ Vaccine and parasite control history and relevant withholding periods.
- ✓ Supplement history
- ✓ Fibre diameter measurements
- ✓ Pregnancy scanning data

...the list goes on!

The technology that is currently available allows the producer to reap the benefits of basing decisions on the performance of an individual animal with an efficiency and practicality that is impossible with manual systems.

Why is individual animal management important? Within a flock there is substantial variation in the characteristics that influence an animal's production level and hence, variation in their economic value to you, the producer. Rather than basing management decisions across an entire flock, as if they were all the same, EID allows you to tailor treatments to a portion of the flock or on an individual basis, reducing costs and labour, while at the same time maximising returns.

Take a mob of pregnant ewes as an example. To improve the lambing performance of the mob, you could feed supplement. If you were able to individually manage animals, however, you could aim that supplementation towards ewes carrying twins or that are under weight, thus reducing your costs and maximising your returns.

Other potential management benefits include:

Wool flock:

Use of fibre diameter measurement in classing and selection.

Ram selection.

Selecting stock for current and future production.

Use of sheep coats.

Grazing management/precision production.

Other potential management benefits (cont.)

Meat Flock:

- ✓ Identification of poor performers.
- ✓ Use of weight records to assist in meeting market specifications.
- ✓ Ram selection.
- ✓ Selecting stock for current and future production.
- ✓ Grazing management/precision production.

Optimising meat and wool:

- ✓ Segmenting Merino lambs into wool and meat groups based on fibre diameter and body weight.
- ✓ Optimal number of ewes to mate to wool vs meat sires.
- ✓ Enhance decisions on which ewe to mate to wool and meat sires based on production levels.

Reproduction:

- ✓ Consideration of reproduction rate on selection strategies.
- ✓ Optimal use of pregnancy scanning data.

Parasite Control:

- ✓ Use of selective drenching.
- ✓ Identifying poor performers in the flock

The long term implications of EID for the wool and sheepmeat industries are very exciting. As we have seen in the dairy and beef industries, the potential is there for greater efficiencies, improved genetic gain, as well as enhanced feedback and information availability, including product feedback, such as carcass quality. There is also the additional benefit of accurate identification of lost or stolen animals and, in the long term, the possibility of 'lifetime traceability'.

The industry implications of such traceability are currently being seen in the cattle industry. These include increased traceability of animals in the incidence of a disease outbreak and the ability to secure increasingly discerning national and international markets regarding disease and chemical freedoms. The EU already demands lifetime traceability of all imported beef products and other markets are closely following suit.

(Source: Sheep CRC, www.sheepcrc.org.au)

Where can I find more information?

Department of Primary Industries NLIS Sheep Extension Team

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General Information:

The following are useful contacts for further information:

NLIS Queries in Victoria

For the NLIS in Victoria call DPI's toll-free NLIS Helpline on 1800678 779 during business hours.

DPI Website:

www.dpi.vic.gov.au

Sheep CRC Website

www.sheepcrc.org.au

Ordering NLIS Devices Online

You can order NLIS devices on-line using a credit card by going to the DPI web site www.dpi.vic.gov.au and following the prompts to Livestock Tags Online.

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