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Pig Identification Systems: Tattoo Branding and Ear Tagging

Identification of pigs going for sale or slaughter is an essential part of monitoring for diseases and chemical residues. To protect human health and maintain public confidence in pig meats it is vital that any disease, chemical contamination or antibacterial residue is quickly traced back to its source. This allows the problem to be rectified before contaminated product gets into the food chain. To meet the increasing demands of consumers for healthy and safe foods, identification at slaughter is essential in this process. The reputation of pig meats and therefore the viability of producers depends on reliable identification.

Obtaining a property identification number

Owners of pigs are required to make application to the Secretary, Department of Primary Industries, for the issue of a property identification number. This can be done at any local Department of Primary Industries office. Applicants will be advised by post of their new property identification number and where they can then obtain tattoo branding equipment and/or ear tags from approved suppliers. Producers who cease to keep pigs on their property are required to notify the Secretary and return any unused tags.

Pig identification

Victoria introduced pig tattoo branding requirements in December 1977, in conjunction with other States. Following consultation with industry, the *Livestock Disease Control Act 1994* has introduced changes to the identification of pigs being consigned for sale or slaughter. These changes now mean:

- All pigs being consigned for sale or to an abattoir or knacker for slaughter must be identified by either a tattoo brand or ear tag, depending on bodyweight, **before** they leave their property of origin.
- Pigs less than 25 kg body weight must be tagged with an approved ear tag. This tag has the same property identification number as the tattoo brand. It is not an option to tattoo pigs less than 25 kg body weight;

they must be ear tagged. Pigs over 25 kg body weight are required to be tattooed with the owner's property identification number.

- All owners of pigs are required to comply with these requirements.

Tattoo brands

The tattoo branding equipment includes the striker, the number 3 indicating Victoria, three letters and tattooing paste or ink. The numeral and letters must be at least 20 mm high, 12 mm wide and 2.5 mm apart. The pins producing the tattoo must be tapered needles at least 6.8 mm long. Carbon based tattooing paste or ink is essential for correct tattooing. Products such as stock sprays, bale stencilling ink or boot polish are unacceptable because they are likely to wash out in the hot water bath during the dehairing process at the abattoirs, thus making the tattoo unreadable.

When and where to tattoo and ear tag

Pigs being sent to a saleyard or an abattoir must be identified with a tattoo or an ear tag, before leaving the property. The tattoo or tag must identify the property on which the pigs have been kept for the previous 7 days. The tattoo should be placed on the left shoulder where it can be easily read on the abattoir processing chain. For pigs under 25 kg body weight, it may be better to apply the tags close to the dispatch date as some losses may occur through fighting.

Stock agents, livestock carriers and abattoir operators

Stock agents, livestock carriers and abattoir operators have an important role to ensure that pigs without tattoo brands or ear tags do not get to saleyards, abattoirs or knackeries and for this reason all three groups have legal responsibilities. A carrier who transports pigs to a saleyard, abattoir or knacker without an approved tattoo brand or ear tag is in breach of the *Livestock Disease Control Act 1994*. Likewise, a stock agent who sells pigs without an approved tattoo brand or ear tag is also in breach of the same Act. An abattoir operator must

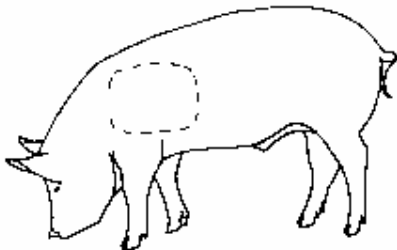
ensure that unidentified pigs are not slaughtered until authorised by the Senior Inspector or Quality Control Officer, after the saleyard lot or property of origin has been determined

Hints for good tattoo branding

- Make sure that the number and letters are in the correct order - stamp a piece of cardboard or look at them in a mirror.
- Make sure that all needles on the brand are clean - grease, dirt, hair and tattooing paste quickly build up on the needles. If not cleaned regularly the tattoo brand will become illegible and clogged needles can also be a source of infection.
- Use only carbon based tattooing paste or ink.
- Reapply paste or ink to the needles before each pig is tattoo branded.
- All needles must pierce the skin; take a good solid swing making sure that the face of the brand lands flat on the skin - it should leave a rectangular mark on the skin surface.
- Pigs with excessive dirt or soil may need to be washed on the shoulder area before tattooing.
- Brands with worn, broken or damaged needles should be replaced.

Tattoo positioning

The tattoo brand should be applied to the left shoulder where it can readily be seen during meat inspection at the abattoir.



Good tattooing

A good tattoo brand will be clearly readable after the dehairing process.



Tattoo equipment suppliers

Tattooing equipment can be ordered through most stock agents who market pigs or direct from the following manufacturers:

Vaucluse Livestock Equipment,
Chapman Road
Inglewood SA 5133
Phone 08 83805672
Fax 0883805176

Leader Products
PO Box 42, CRAIGIEBURN 3064
Phone 03 93082663
Fax 03 93083488

Pig ear tag suppliers

Ear tags for pigs under 25 kg bodyweight can be ordered from the following suppliers:

Leader Products
PO Box 42, CRAIGIEBURN 3064
Phone 03 93082663
Fax 03 93083488

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