

EID

(Electronic Identification of Sheep)

Having attended the NSA breed forum in March I can not claim to be an expert on this subject but I think I can explain a little about it and how it will affect us. The first thing to say is that apart from a more expensive ear tag, it will make little impact on most Cotswold sheep breeders. Sheep will have to carry two tags, one electronic tag (the Electronic Identifier) and an identical non electronic one. The tag number will record the holding of birth as well as the animal's unique individual number; it may also record the society flock number.

However, it should be noted that plans are not yet finalised and the NSA is still fighting a rear guard action to get the rules changed, if not abolished, while DEFRA is still consulting with the industry on how best to implement the rules. There are apparently three alternatives on the table and while it is obvious that one rule will not suit all of the UK, let alone Europe, we will be stuck with one set of European rules and they have to be made to work.

- It seems fairly obvious at this stage that sheep over 12 months old will have to have an electronic tag, although your records do not have to be kept electronically and there is no requirement for you to have a tag reader.
- It also looks likely that lambs going direct to slaughter under 12 months old will not have to have an electronic tag nor be recorded individually, although this is an area that is currently under review.
- What is clear is that you will not be able to keep sheep on a batch number that are older than 12 months. The practice of keeping lambs until they are shearlings before tagging them will have to stop, regardless of whether they are going to be kept for breeding or sold for slaughter.
- Any sheep that leaves its holding of birth, and is not going directly to slaughter, will have to have an EID. There is a lot of debate about store lambs that will be slaughtered before they are 12 months. This is a very sticky area as it could prove impossible for store lamb finishers to conform to the EID rules without fitting electronic tags. These would have to be fitted on the holding that the lambs were born on.

There continues to be a huge amount of debate about the number of records and type of movement documents that will have to be kept. They all sound a bit scary, and if I still had several hundred sheep to worry about I would be concerned, but with a small flock I do not think it will have much impact, regardless of which derogation we finish up with. Even if we do have to record each individual movement it seems likely that if we move our sheep around in a bunch, we will still be able to record the batch movement rather than having to write down each animal's ear number. We will have to record each animal's number that we take to shows, but that is nothing new for us.

Personally I think EID offers huge opportunities to the sheep industry and many speakers reflected this, although reluctantly, and it was said on several occasions that in three years time we may well look back and wonder what all the fuss was about!!