

# Official Eartags – Criteria and Options

January 31, 2025

This document summarizes the criteria and options for official identification eartags.

## Minimum criteria for official identification eartags for individual animals:

- Imprinted with a nationally unique official animal identification number
- Official eartag shield<sup>1</sup> 

## Basic characteristics:

- Tamper evident, high retention
- Other characteristics defined in [Official Animal Identification Device Standards document](#)

**Table 1. Official Identification Number Systems for Individual Animals**

Number	Format of Animal Number	Number Examples
<b>National Uniform Eartagging System (NUES)</b>	9 characters - 2-character State or Tribal <sup>2</sup> code - 3 alpha series - 4 digits in a sequential numerical series	23 ELV 4574 PA ELV 4574
	8 characters - Swine and other species (except sheep and goats) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 2 numeric State or Tribal code</li> <li>○ 2 alphabetical series</li> <li>○ 4 digits in a numerical series</li> </ul>	23 AB 4574
	8 characters - Sheep and goats (exclusive to scrapie program) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 2 alpha postal abbreviation</li> <li>○ 2 alphabetical or alphanumeric series</li> <li>○ 4 digits in a numerical series</li> </ul>	PA AB 4574 or PA A2 4574
<b>Animal identification number (AIN)</b>	15 digits; 840 (numeric code for USA) are the first three digits for animals born in the United States  Note: ICAR manufacturer codes or “USA” can be used as the first three characters for tags manufactured before March 11, 2014 and applied to the animal before March 11, 2015.	840 003 123 456 789  900 152 123 456 789 USA 000 097 499 999
<b>Flock-based number with herd management number</b>	Flock identification number (maximum of 9 characters prefixed with State’s postal abbreviation) with a unique herd management number (up to 6 characters). Does not include I, O or Q except as part of a postal abbreviation.	MN0456 4275
<b>Location-based number<sup>3</sup> With the herd management number</b>	Either a premises identification number (PIN) or location identification number (LID) with a unique herd management number. PINs have 7 characters, LIDs may have 6, 7 or 8 characters, and the herd management number may have up to 6 characters.	006ER2A 4275

<sup>1</sup> The official eartag shield is the U.S. Route Shield graphic with “US” or the State postal abbreviation or Tribal alpha code imprinted within the shield. Since March 11, 2015, all official eartags applied to animals must bear an official eartag shield. APHIS VS authorizes tag manufacturers to imprint the official eartag shield on approved tags.

<sup>2</sup> Tribal alpha and numeric codes are assigned by APHIS when requested by a Tribe (see [QAIDS document for listing](#))

<sup>3</sup> Location identifiers include both the premises identification number (PIN) issued through the PIN allocator and the Location Identification (LID) numbers administered by the State or Tribe.

**Table 2. Summary of USDA Official Eartags (does not include official reactor tags, etc.)**

Official Identification Eartags	General Explanation
<b>Official Vaccination Eartag (Brucellosis)</b> (See Table 3.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restricted use for bovine and bison brucellosis calfhood vaccination.</li> <li>- Only valid as official identification when applied BEFORE November 5, 2024.<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>
<b>National Uniform Eartagging System (NUES) Tags</b> (See Tables 4 and 5.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commonly referred to as “Silver” or “Brite” tags.</li> <li>- Historically used for disease testing and interstate movement.</li> <li>- VS Memorandum 578.12 revised March 15, 2011, to allow distribution to producers through State and Tribal authorities.</li> <li>- Only valid as official identification for cattle and bison when applied BEFORE November 5, 2024.<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Animal identification number (AIN) “840” Devices</b> (See Table 6.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provided directly to producers from manufacturers (or their distributors), or to producers through accredited veterinarians or animal health officials. Various sizes, shapes, colors. Visual-only<sup>4</sup> or with variable frequency RFID technology. The visual imprinting of the AIN on the tag is the official identifier for AIN tags with radio frequency technology. AIN tags may be imprinted with additional information for program identity, e.g., age, source programs.</li> </ul> <p>Note: 840 AINs are available in microchip implants for equine and other species.</p>
<b>Sheep and goat tags</b> (See Tables 7 and 8.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Serial and flock identification tags including scrapie flock certification program tags approved through the scrapie program and provided at no cost to producers, markets, veterinarians, etc., through State or AVIC offices. “840” tags are also provided for regulatory work in infected and exposed flocks. Producers may purchase customized flock identification or “840” tags from approved tag manufacturers.</li> </ul>
<b>Premises identification number (PIN) tags – Slaughter swine</b> (See Table 9.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Imprinted with premises identification number. Various tags approved through authorized manufacturers.</li> </ul>

**Table 3. Official Vaccination Eartag (Brucellosis)**

Tag Information	Description
Program use	Brucellosis
Material type	Metal
Color	Orange <i>(APHIS 91–45–013 “Brucellosis Eradication: Uniform Methods and Rules”, October 1, 2003)</i>
Species used on	Cattle and bison, recommended applied to the right ear only
Information on the tag	Front of tag <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 State code</li> <li>- “V” followed by 2 alpha characters in series</li> <li>- 4 numbers in a sequential numerical series</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> Visual-only tags are only valid as official identification for cattle and bison if applied prior to November 5, 2024 per [9 CFR Part 86](#).

	Example: 23VFE0578
	Back of tag - "VAC" to reflect the brucellosis vaccination and official eartag shield
<b>Additional printing specifications</b>	"T" and "S" is used following the State code to avoid duplication of numbers when the "V" series has been completely used.
<b>Issued/distributed to</b>	State/Federal employees & accredited veterinarians performing official brucellosis vaccination
<b>Distribution records/reporting</b>	Record of tags issued - The date, receipt, and the first and last serial number of the tags issued should be recorded. Record of tags applied - Permanent record of tags applied. - Record of brucellosis vaccination (VS Forms 4-24 and 4-26)
<b>Other comments</b>	CFR definitions: Official vaccination eartag. An APHIS approved identification eartag conforming to the alpha-numeric National Uniform Eartagging System which provides unique identification for each animal. The eartag shall have a "V" followed by 2 letters and 4 numbers. States which require more official vaccination eartags than the number of combinations available in the "V" series of tags shall use a "T" or "S" followed by 2 letters and 4 numbers. Duplicate reissue of official vaccination eartags shall not be made more often than once each 15 years.
<b>How to obtain</b>	State and Federal animal health officials, accredited veterinarians. For use only when bovine/bison calves are being vaccinated against brucellosis. Only valid as official identification if applied prior to November 5, 2024. <sup>4</sup>



**Table 4. National Uniform Eartagging System – NUES Tag**

9-character Format

(Commonly referred to as a "Silver" or "Brite" tag)

Tag Information	Description
<b>Program use</b>	Not a specific disease program tag
<b>Material type</b>	Primary metal. Small plastic tag options have also been approved.
<b>Color</b>	Silver and some color options (orange is reserved for brucellosis vaccination)

<b>Species used on</b>	Valid as official identification for cattle and bison only if applied prior to November 5, 2024. <sup>4</sup> . Acceptable for other species except sheep/goats.
<b>Information on the tag</b>	<p>Front of tag</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 numeric representing State or Tribal code, or 2 alpha characters for State postal abbreviation or Tribal code</li> <li>- 3 alpha characters in an alphabetical series (omit “V” and “T” as first alpha in the series)</li> <li>- 4 digits in a sequential series</li> </ul> <p>Example: 60 ABC 0502</p>
	<p>Back of tag</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official eartag shield</li> <li>- “VS” is imprinted adjacent to the shield on tags purchased by APHIS VS</li> <li>- “VS” is not imprinted on NUES tags purchased by States or Tribes.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional printing specifications</b>	Printing other information is allowed if the print size specification of the required information is maintained.
<b>Issued/distributed to</b>	Federal & State animal health officials, accredited veterinarians. Distribution directly to producers from accredited veterinarians or State/Tribe Animal Health Officials is optional and determined by the State or Tribe.
<b>Distribution records/reporting</b>	Tag distribution records maintained by the State or Tribe. In some States, the administration of the NUES tags may be shared with the VS Area office. The Animal Identification Management System may be used for maintaining the distribution records.
<b>Other comments</b>	States and Tribes may have up to 2 NUES tag types provided through the APHIS warehouse. Options could include using an alpha prefix instead of the standard numeric format or a different color.



**Table 5. National Uniform Eartagging System – NUES Tag**

*8-character Format with State/Tribe numeric code*

<b>Tag Information</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Program use</b>	8-character NUES tags with State/Tribe numeric code are not used for a specific disease program and may not be used in place of a scrapie program tag for sheep and goats NOTE: 8-character NUES tags with State/Tribe alpha code are reserved for the scrapie program. See scrapie program serial tags for more information.
<b>Material type</b>	Metal
<b>Color</b>	Silver and other color options

<b>Species used on</b>	Most commonly used on species with smaller ears (deer/elk, swine, etc., except sheep and goats).
<b>Information on the tag</b>	<b>Front of tag</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 numeric characters representing State or Tribal code</li> <li>or</li> <li>2 alpha characters for State postal abbreviation for scrapie program tags</li> <li>- 2 alpha characters in an alphabetical series</li> <li>- 4 digits in a sequential series</li> </ul> Example: 23BG0575
	<b>Back of tag</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official eartag shield</li> <li>- "VS" is imprinted adjacent to the shield on tags procured by APHIS VS</li> <li>- "VS" is not imprinted on NUES tags purchased by States or Tribes.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional printing specifications</b>	Printing other information is allowed if the print size specification of the required information is maintained.
<b>Issued/distributed to</b>	Federal & State animal health officials, accredited veterinarians. Distribution to producers through accredited veterinarians or State/Tribe Animal Health Officials is optional and determined by the State or Tribe according to VS Memorandum 578.12 revised March 15, 2011.
<b>Distribution records/reporting</b>	Tag distribution records maintained by the State or Tribe. In some States, the administration of the NUES tags may be shared with the AVIC office. The Animal Identification Management System may be used for maintaining the distribution records.
<b>How to obtain</b>	Contact the State and Federal animal health officials, Tribal authority, accredited veterinarians. Approved NUES tag listing is provided at: <a href="http://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/downloads/ADT_device_nues.pdf">http://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/downloads/ADT_device_nues.pdf</a> .



**Table 6. Animal Identification Number (AIN) "840" Tags**

<b>Tag Information</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Program use</b>	Applicable for all official identification requirements
<b>Material type</b>	Plastic: With or without RFID <sup>4</sup>
<b>Color</b>	Various colors
<b>Species used on</b>	Various sizes and shapes. Eartags are approved separately and specify for which species they can be used. Either ear application
<b>Information on the tag</b> For describing 2-piece tags, the designation of "Tag Piece A," is the	Tag Piece A: Inside of ear; visible from the front of the animal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official eartag shield</li> </ul>

<p>piece attached to the inside of the animal's ear (visual from the front of the animal). "Tag Piece B" is the piece attached to the outside of the animal's ear (visual from behind the animal).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 15-digit code with 840 as first 3 digits (numeric code for USA)</li> <li>- Manufacturer's logo or trademark (printed or impression of)</li> </ul> <p>2D symbology code representing the AIN (tags printed after July 2013)</p> <p>Tag Piece B: Outside the ear; visible from behind the animal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official eartag shield</li> <li>- UNLAWFUL TO REMOVE</li> <li>- Imprinting the AIN on Tag Piece B is optional. If this is the case, the tag set is packaged so that the tag pieces stay together as a pair before being applied.</li> </ul> <p><i>Note: Print specification for swine tags is different due to species anatomical differences in providing functional visibility of information imprinted on swine tags.</i></p>
<p><b>Additional printing specifications</b></p>	<p>All tags have minimum print size specifications for required information imprinted on the tags. Other information, most applicable to the panel tags, may be imprinted on the tag if it does not reduce the readability of the required information.</p> <p>Tags with RFID must have all 15 digits of the AIN printed on the tag pieces that contain the transponder.</p>
<p><b>Issued/distributed to</b></p>	<p>USDA approves all "840" AIN devices and allocates AINs only to authorized manufacturers that use the numbers on approved devices.</p> <p>AIN manufacturers distribute tags through AIN managers with whom they have an agreement and directly to State/Federal animal health officials. AIN manufacturers may be AIN managers.</p>
<p><b>Distribution records/reporting</b></p>	<p>The entity (animal health officials or AIN manufacturer or managers) that provides the tag to the producer is responsible for recording distribution records to the Animal Identification Management System (AIMS)<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, if the tag is distributed to an AIN distributor, the distribution record must be submitted to the AIMS. When issued for sheep and goats, the tag record must be administered through the scrapie program tag application of AIMS.</p> <p>A premises identification number (PIN) or Location Identifier (LID) of the farm or ranch is required and is used for reporting the distribution record to the Animal Identification Management System.</p>
<p><b>Other comments</b></p>	<p>Tag pairs displaying the same AIN (duplicate AINs) are available for application to the same animal only (combination of visual tags or visual and RFID).</p>
<p><b>How to obtain</b></p>	<p>Producers and State Animal Health Officials may purchase AIN tags from AIN managers representing authorized AIN tag manufacturers (contact AIN manufacturers for information on their AIN managers). See listing at: <a href="http://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/downloads/AIN_device_list.pdf">http://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/downloads/AIN_device_list.pdf</a></p>

**AIN Tags with the 840 prefix**

<sup>5</sup> If a state or tribal animal health official maintains complete AIN device distribution records through their own system, APHIS does not require them to record the distributions in the AIMS database.

AIN Panel Tag (Visual Only)	AIN RF Button Tags	AIN RF Panel Tags
		
Example of "Industry Logo" AIN Tag	Paired AIN Visual/RFID Tag Set	
		

**AIN Tags with ICAR Manufacturer Code and “USA” prefix**

Mfr Code and USA Prefix AIN Tags	AIN Tag with Mfr Code	AIN Tag with “USA” Prefix
<p>AIN Tags that use the manufacturer codes (900 series) or the “USA” prefix are official for tags manufactured before March 11, 2014 and applied to animals before March 11, 2015.</p> <p>These tags do not have the Official Eartag Shield imprinted on the tag.</p>		<p>Photo Not Available</p>
AIN tags with “USA” and Truncated Animal Number		
<p>APHIS has recognized as official a variation of the AIN with the USA prefix.</p> <p>Eartags imprinted with “USA” followed by the 8- or 9-digit number applied to animals before March 11, 2015 are recognized as official for the life of the animal.</p> <p>For example, the 15-character number, “USA 000 097 499 999” may have USA 97 499 999 imprinted on the tag.</p>		

**Table 7. Flock Identification Tags**

Tag Information	Description
<b>Program use</b>	Scrapie eradication program - Applicable for all official identification needs of sheep or goats; however, tags must be applied in accordance with scrapie program application and recordkeeping requirements.
<b>Material type</b>	Plastic or metal
<b>Color</b>	USDA-provided tags are white or blue (slaughter only). Producers can purchase tags in various colors.
<b>Species used on</b>	Sheep and goats
<p><b>Information on the tag</b> For describing 2-piece tags, the designation of “Tag Piece A,” is the piece typically attached to the inside of the animal’s ear (visual from the front of the animal). “Tag Piece B” is the piece typically attached to the outside of the animal’s ear (visual from behind the animal).</p>	<p>Plastic –Tag Piece A: Inside of ear; visible from the front of the animal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official eartag shield</li> <li>- Flock identification number (maximum of 9 characters with first two the State abbreviation)</li> <li>- Unique herd management number (maximum of 6 characters)</li> <li>- Manufacturer’s logo or trademark (printed or impression of)</li> </ul> <p>Plastic – Tag Piece B: Outside the ear; visible from behind the animal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official eartag shield</li> <li>- UNLAWFUL TO REMOVE</li> </ul> <p>May include the flock identification number (maximum of 9 characters with first two the State abbreviation) and/or unique herd management number</p> <p>Metal single piece – Front of tag</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flock identification number (maximum of 8 characters with first two the State abbreviation)</li> </ul> <p>Metal single piece – Back of tag</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official eartag shield</li> <li>- Unique herd management number up to 6 digits in a sequential series</li> </ul> <p>Example: PA0575 4567</p>
<b>Additional printing specifications</b>	May include customized printing in addition to the required printing on producer purchased tags. May include “SFCP” (Scrapie Flock Certification Program) when issued to participating producers.
<b>Issued/distributed to</b>	Producers who own flocks
<b>Distribution records/reporting</b>	Distributed through AIMS directly from approved tag manufacturer to producer
<b>Other comments</b>	Mandatory USDA identification program for sheep and goats. Producers in the voluntary SFCP program may have tags imprinted with SFCP. All sheep over 18 months of age; sexually intact sheep under 18 months of age that are sold for breeding or exhibition; sheep sold unrestricted, sheep not in slaughter channels; and sheep that have lambed or are pregnant. Sexually intact goats not in slaughter channels of any age that do not meet the requirements to be considered low risk commercial goats, such as those that are registered, sold for commercial milk production, sold or used for exhibition or commingled with sheep.
<b>How to obtain</b>	Producers order tags through AVIC or State office or purchase directly from approved tag manufacturers.

## Flock Identification Tags



XX represents State postal code.

**Table 8. Scrapie Program Serial Tags**

Tag Information	Description
<b>Program use</b>	Scrapie program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Applicable for all official identification needs of sheep or goats; however, tags must be applied in accordance with scrapie program application and recordkeeping requirements.</li> </ul>
<b>Material type</b>	Plastic or metal
<b>Color</b>	White for sheep and goats eligible to move as breeding animals and blue for “slaughter only” animals. Red metal is used for live scrapie positive animals. Yellow metal is used for permanently restricted high-risk animals.
<b>Species used on</b>	Sheep and goats
<b>Information on the tag</b> For describing 2-piece tags, the designation of “Tag Piece A,” is the piece typically attached to the inside of the animal’s ear (visual from the front of the animal). “Tag Piece B” is the piece typically attached to the outside of the animal’s ear (visual from behind the animal).	Tag Piece A: Inside of ear; visible from the front of the animal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official eartag shield</li> <li>- 8 characters</li> <li>- State postal abbreviation followed by a letter and number or a number and a letter, then 4 numbers (Examples: PAA12345 or PA1A2345)</li> </ul> Manufacturer’s logo or trademark (printed or impression of)  Tag Piece B: Outside the ear; visible from behind the animal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official eartag shield</li> <li>- UNLAWFUL TO REMOVE</li> </ul> Metal single piece – Front of tag <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 8 characters</li> <li>- State postal abbreviation followed by two letters and 4 numbers (Example: PABG0575)</li> </ul> Metal single piece – Back of tag <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- State postal abbreviation and Official eartag shield</li> </ul> Metal – inside tag, tag company name
<b>Additional printing specifications</b>	Blue tags are printed with “SLAUGHTER ONLY,” “MEAT ONLY,” or “MEAT” on the back or Tag Piece B. Red metal has SCR printed on the back. Yellow metal has HR or EX printed on the back.
<b>Issued/distributed to</b>	Markets, dealers, veterinarians, feedlot operators and others who do not own breeding flocks
<b>Distribution records/reporting</b>	Distributed through AIMS
<b>Other comments</b>	Mandatory USDA identification program for sheep and goats. All sheep over 18 months of age; sexually intact sheep under 18 months of age that are sold for breeding or exhibition; sheep sold unrestricted, sheep not in slaughter channels; and sheep that have lambed or are pregnant. Sexually intact goats not in slaughter channels of any age that do not meet the requirements to be considered low risk commercial goats, such as those that are registered, sold for commercial milk production, sold or used for exhibition, or commingled with sheep.
<b>How to obtain</b>	Markets, dealers, veterinarians, feedlot operators and others who do not own breeding flocks order tags through AVIC or State office.

## Scrapie Program Serial Tags

White - applied to sheep/goats that meet the requirements to move for any purpose.



## Blue Slaughter Only / MEAT Tags



## Red Scrapie Positive Tag



Yellow High Risk Animal Tag – applied only to retained permanently restricted scrapie high risk animals



**Table 9. Premises Identification Number (PIN) Tag for Slaughter Swine**

Tag Information	Description
Program use	Swine
Material type	Plastic
Color	Various colors (contact tag manufacturer)
Species used on	Slaughter swine
Information on the tag For describing 2-piece tags, the designation of "Tag Piece A," is the piece attached to the inside of the animal's ear. "Tag Piece B" is the piece attached to the outside of the animal's ear.	<p>Tag Piece A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official eartag shield</li> <li>- UNLAWFUL TO REMOVE</li> </ul> <p>Tag Piece B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- State postal abbreviation or Tribe 2-character alpha code <sup>1</sup></li> <li>- PIN</li> <li>- Official eartag shield</li> <li>- UNLAWFUL TO REMOVE</li> <li>- Manufacturer's logo or trademark (printed or impression of)</li> <li>- Barcode of corresponding PIN on the reverse side.</li> </ul>
Additional printing specifications	All tags have minimum print size specifications for required information imprinted on the tags. Other information may be imprinted on the tag if it does not reduce the readability of the required information. The herd management number is optional.
Issued/distributed to	Swine producers
Distribution records/reporting	Manufacturers report distribution of tags by product code to APHIS VS.
Other comments	If a PIN tag includes a unique within-herd management number that is imprinted by the manufacturer to ensure its permanency, the tag qualifies as an official eartag for interstate movement of individual animals.
How to obtain	Producers may obtain directly from authorized manufacturers. See listing at: <a href="http://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/downloads/swine_device_listing.pdf">http://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/downloads/swine_device_listing.pdf</a>



Tag Piece B <sup>2</sup>  
(Back of ear)



Inside of Tag Piece B <sup>2</sup>  
(Not in View while tags is on the pig)



Tag Piece B <sup>3</sup>  
(Inside of ear)

<sup>1</sup> State postal abbreviation imprinted on PIN tags shipped from manufacturer after August 1, 2009. Since Tribes do not have postal abbreviations, APHIS will reserve a 2-character alpha code upon request.

<sup>2</sup> The piece attached to the outside of the animal's ear

<sup>3</sup> The piece attached to the inside of the animal's ear