



United States
Department of
Agriculture

VETERINARY SERVICES MEMORANDUM NO. 578.12

Animal and Plant
Health Inspection
Service

TO: VS Management Team (VSMT)

Veterinary Services

FROM: John R. Clifford
Deputy Administrator

John R. Clifford 3/15/11

Washington, DC
20250

SUBJECT: Distribution and Use of Official Identification Eartags with Numbers
Conforming to the National Uniform Eartagging System

I. PURPOSE

This memorandum originally defined Veterinary Services' (VS) policy for authorized distribution and use of official identification eartags used for cattle or bison with numbers conforming to the National Uniform Eartagging System (NUES). This revised memorandum clarifies the use of NUES eartags, expands the distribution of these tags directly to producers, and clarifies how NUES eartags may be used in the Dairy Herd Information Association (DHIA) program. It does not make NUES mandatory, but establishes standards on how distribution and use of the eartags will be administered.

This memorandum does not pertain to the use or distribution of official eartags that are not part of the NUES numbering system format. Eartags using the animal identification number (AIN) format (visual or radio frequency identification (RFID)) or tags using a location-based numbering system format are administered differently.

Further, this memorandum does not pertain to sheep and goats. Distribution of NUES eartags for use on sheep and goats is administered through the National Scrapie Eradication Program.

II. CANCELLATION

This memorandum replaces VS Memorandum No. 578.6, Supplement 1, dated May 8, 2006.

III. GENERAL

USDA developed NUES for the official identification of animals in the United States, providing a nationally unique identification number for each animal. NUES uses an eight- or nine-character alphanumeric format, consisting of a two-numeral State, Tribe, or Territory code or two-letter State postal code (see attachment for listing of codes) followed by two or three letters and four additional numerals. Official APHIS disease control programs may specify which format to use.



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VS, State, Tribe, and Territory animal health officials have used this numbering system as a tool in providing traceability for disease control programs. Adequate traceability is required for obtaining and maintaining State status for most national animal disease programs. Therefore, NUES continues to be an essential tool in the successful implementation of disease eradication, control, and surveillance programs. In addition, NUES eartags offer a low-cost method of identifying animals for interstate movement.

The instructions in VS Memorandum 578.6 (Identification of Market Livestock for Disease Surveillance) and Supplements 2 and 3 (governing the application and use of the NUES as it applies to tags for cattle or bison) remain in effect until cancelled.

IV. USE OF NUES EARTAGS IN OFFICIAL DISEASE PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Authorized distribution of NUES eartags specifically designed and used for official regulatory purposes is limited to VS personnel, State, Territory, and Tribal animal health officials, their staffs, and accredited veterinarians. These eartags will be distributed to carry out official VS animal disease programs and surveillance activities (such as calfhood vaccination and diagnostic testing). Individuals who receive official disease program eartags are responsible for:

- A. Maintaining the security of the NUES eartags and properly using them.
- B. Reporting any loss, theft, or deliberate or accidental misuse of the eartags immediately to the Area Veterinarian in Charge (AVIC) similarly to what is required for accredited veterinarians in accordance with title 9, *Code of Federal Regulations* (9 CFR), section 161.4(j).
- C. Ensuring that sufficient contact information is collected about where NUES eartags are applied to meet the traceability needs of the State, Tribe, or Territory. At a minimum, the record must include:
 1. The name of the owner of the livestock operation where the tags are applied.
 2. The street address, city, State, and ZIP Code where the tags are applied.
 3. The identification numbers applied.
 4. The date the tags were applied.
 5. The name and contact information of the person applying the tags.

The Animal Identification Management System will be available to States and Tribes for maintaining tag distribution records if they wish to use it.

Other authorized uses of NUES eartags are described in Sections V and VI.

V. NUES EARTAGS DISTRIBUTED OUTSIDE OF DISEASE PROGRAMS

- A. State, Tribal, and Territory animal health officials and accredited veterinarians¹ may provide NUES identification eartags to producers who wish to use them for official identification and other purposes without administering the eartags through a specific disease program. This does not apply to eartags that are specific to a disease program, such as brucellosis calthood vaccination eartags. This enables producers to use the eartags as a tool to qualify their animals for interstate movement. In such cases, the State, Tribe, or Territory animal health officials will maintain complete oversight for the integrity of the information.

General responsibilities of State, Tribal, or Territory animal health officials include:

1. Informing VS when this NUES tag distribution method is authorized in their jurisdiction.
2. Informing VS which prefix options (numeric or letter) they plan to use. NUES tags with a State numeric prefix can be ordered from the VS warehouse. Those ordering tags for the first time should allow several weeks for the order to be processed and the tags to be manufactured.
3. If obtaining NUES tags directly from a manufacturer:
 - a. Only purchasing APHIS-approved NUES eartags from an authorized manufacturer and reaffirming that the eartags meet the definition of an official eartag in 9 CFR 71.1. The eartag must:
 - (1) Have the entire NUES number and the U.S. shield imprinted on it.
 - (2) Be tamper resistant and designed for one-time use.
 - (3) Have a high retention rate.
 - b. Ensuring the number sequence is carefully coordinated with the manufacturer so duplicate tag numbers are avoided.

¹ Accredited veterinarians may be able to obtain NUES eartags from State or Tribal animal health officials for distribution to producers depending on the policies established at the State or Tribal level. In such cases, State, Tribal, or Territory animal health officials will fulfill the responsibilities outlined in Section V.A.

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4. Ensuring sufficient contact information is collected about where NUES eartags are distributed to meet the traceability needs of the State, Tribe, or Territory. At a minimum, the record must include:
 - a. The name of the person the tags are issued to.
 - b. The street address, city, State, and ZIP code where the tags are distributed.
 - c. The identification numbers issued.
 - d. The date the tags were issued.
 - e. The name and contact information of the person issuing the tags.
 - f. The Animal Identification Management System will be available to States and Tribes for maintaining tag distribution records if they wish to use it.
5. Maintaining a record of NUES eartags issued for a minimum of 10 years, or longer if needed to support the traceability plan for the State or Tribe.
6. Managing inventory if the State, Tribe, or Territory chooses to keep a stockpile of eartags.
7. Informing the producers of the following:
 - a. The importance of maintaining security of their eartags. The eartags are for their use only and should not be redistributed, shared, or traded to other producers.
 - b. Lost or stolen eartags must be reported.
 - c. How to report lost or stolen eartags and contact information for additional information or questions.
 - d. How to correctly apply the eartags for maximum retention.
 - e. Regulations prohibit the removal of official identification devices (9 CFR 71.22), except at the time of slaughter or other termination event (such as rendering or submission to a diagnostic laboratory). In other limited circumstances, an official USDA animal identification device such as an eartag may need to be removed from the animal to which it

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was initially applied. Situations for which tag removal may be considered include:

- (1) Deterioration of the eartag where tag loss appears to be likely or where readability of the number is impaired.
- (2) Infection of the animal's ear, which necessitates applying a new eartag at a slightly different location in the ear.
- (3) Inoperability of the electronic component of a radio-frequency (RF) eartag.
- (4) Incompatibility with the management system of an RF eartag.
- (5) Unacceptable functionality of the management system of an RF eartag.
- (6) Malfunction of the electronic component of an RF eartag.

f. Any such removal must be authorized by the AVIC and/or State, Tribe, or Territory animal health official and the event recorded, which includes:

- (1) Date the device is removed.
- (2) Contact information for the location at which the device is removed.
- (3) The official number of the device being removed.
- (4) Device type of the tag being removed (e.g., visual plastic eartag, visual metal eartag, or RFID eartag).
- (5) Reason for removal.
- (6) The new official USDA number of the device being applied to the same animal as a replacement identification.
- (7) Device type of the replacement eartag (e.g., visual plastic eartag, visual metal eartag, or RFID eartag).

B. Responsibilities of Tribes to inform VS which of the following options they choose to issue tags:

1. Obtaining NUES eartags through the State in which the Tribes are located, and working with the State to maintain appropriate records;
2. Obtaining NUES eartags through the appropriate VS Area Office, and working with the Area Office to maintain appropriate records; or
3. Issuing Tribal-specific NUES eartags to Tribal producers, and maintaining records according to the needs of the Tribe.

C. VS responsibilities when NUES eartags are distributed for use outside disease programs:

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1. Maintaining a list of manufacturers authorized by APHIS to produce NUES eartags and the eartags that are APHIS approved for each manufacturer.
2. Maintaining sufficient inventory of standard metal silver-colored NUES eartags in the warehouse for States, Tribes, or Territories that choose this distribution method. VS only stocks NUES tags with the numeric prefix.

3. Maintaining a list on the APHIS Web site of States, Tribes, or Territories offering this official eartag distribution method.

4. Providing and maintaining the Animal Identification Management System for reporting the distribution of NUES eartags for States, Tribes, and Territories that elect to use the system. The State, Tribe, or Territory may develop other systems of maintaining records of tags issued and applied to meet its needs.
5. Providing Tribal-specific NUES codes for Tribes that elect this distribution method.
6. Providing oversight of the State, Tribal, or Territory distribution record systems and inventory control through the normal review process.

VI. USE OF NUES EARTAGS IN THE DHIA

- A. A block of NUES numbers may be set aside in each State, Tribe, or Territory for the identification of dairy animals enrolled in the DHIA program. These numbers may also be used for disease surveillance and traceback purposes.
- B. An eartag distribution plan must be in effect in each State, Tribe, or Territory where the DHIA has tag distribution. A written agreement setting aside a block of numbers for cattle to be identified with DHIA eartags must be in place between the AVIC; the State, Tribal, or Territory animal health official; and the State DHIA representative. Additionally, the AVIC and State, Tribal, or Territory animal health official will approve the current recordkeeping system. The animal health official will also clarify responsibilities for maintaining a database of all DHIA eartag numbers and recording information about the herd in which the eartags are applied to meet the traceability needs of the State where the animals are identified. When the DHIA uses NUES, the DHIA must record the numbers when the animals are identified and keep a record of the numbers for a minimum of 10 years after the eartags are applied.

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- C. AVICs will ensure that a copy of the agreement is sent to the tag company if the eartagging numbers or procedures for maintaining records of these tags are changed.
- D. Each State, Tribe, or Territory may purchase approved eartags from any APHIS-authorized manufacturer if the AVIC, the animal health official, and the DHIA's representative in charge of the program in that jurisdiction agree to keep a record in the database on the DHIA tags ordered.

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- E. The DHIA must send a record of all applied eartags to the appropriate office according to the agreement described in Section VI.B above on at least a monthly basis. The record will include sufficient information about the location where NUES eartags are distributed to meet the traceability needs of the State, Tribe, or Territory. At a minimum, the record must include:
 - 1. The name of the owner of the herd where the animals are identified.
 - 2. The street address, city, State, and ZIP code of the livestock operation where the animals are assigned.
 - 3. The identification numbers applied to animals.
 - 4. The date the tags are applied.

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- 5. Name and contact information of the person who applied the tags.
 - 6. The Animal Identification Management System will be available to States, Tribes, and DHIA for maintaining tag distribution records if they wish to use it.

The Area Office will coordinate the recording of information with the State, Tribe, and Territory.

- F. Any loss, theft, or deliberate or accidental misuse of these eartags must be reported immediately to the AVIC.
- G. Removal of official identification devices is prohibited (see Section V).

VII. COMPLIANCE

To help ensure compliance, authorized individuals who distribute NUES tags are asked to continue to provide information, education, and outreach to tag recipients. They are also asked to report any misuse of official eartags including removal or other concerns about

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compliance with these guidelines to the AVIC. APHIS will review the concerns and respond appropriately.

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Attachment

State, Tribe, and Territory Codes for the National Uniform Eartagging System²

State, Territory, Tribe	Postal and Numeric Codes	State, Territory, Tribe	Postal and Numeric Codes
Alabama	AL 64	Navajo Nation ³	NN 77
Alaska	AK 96	Nebraska	NE 47
American Samoa	AS 99	Nevada	NV 88
Arizona	AZ 86	New Hampshire	NH 12
Arkansas	AR 71	New Jersey	NJ 22
California	CA 93	New Mexico	NM 85
Colorado	CO 84	New York	NY 21
Commonwealth Of The Northern Marianas	MP 98	North Carolina	NC 55
Connecticut	CT 16	North Dakota	ND 45
Delaware	DE 50	Ohio	OH 31
Florida	FL 58	Oklahoma	OK 73
Georgia	GA 57	Oregon	OR 92
Guam	GU 97	Pennsylvania	PA 23
Hawaii	HI 95	Puerto Rico	PR 94
Idaho	ID 82	Rhode Island	RI 15
Illinois	IL 33	South Carolina	SC 56
Indiana	IN 32	South Dakota	SD 46
Iowa	IA 42	Tennessee	TN 63
Kansas	KS 48	Texas	TX 74
Kentucky	KY 61	Utah	UT 87
Louisiana	LA 72	Vermont	VT 13
Maine	ME 11	Virgin Islands (U.S.)	VI 59
Maryland	MD 51	Virginia	VA 52
Massachusetts	MA 14	Washington	WA 91
Michigan	MI 34	West Virginia	WV 54
Minnesota	MN 41	Wisconsin	WI 35
Mississippi	MS 65	Wyoming	WY 83
Missouri	MO 43		
Montana	MT 81		

² The State postal code abbreviation may be used if a State chooses.

³ If additional Tribes wish to issue their own NUES tags, USDA will issue them a two-character numeric or letter code.