



BREEDING

Tagging Animals for Identification

Purpose: Tagging all animals within the breeding herd (gilts, sows, boars and V boars) enables easy identification. Clear identification is necessary to ensure correct mating protocols, accurate recording and monitoring of individual performance records and for stock checks. Having individual identification provides accurate information for culling and the medicines book.

Equipment required	Personal safety
Tags	Restrain the pig at tagging
Pliers	Indelible pens if tags are not pre-stamped
Disinfectant	

- Tagging usually takes place when gilts enter the breeding herd or when sows lose their tags
- In closed herds replacement litters may also be tagged shortly after farrowing to enable clear identification, this may be by tag colour or an individual number
- A unique number should identify individual animals within the breeding herd
- Sows with lost tags should be retagged with their original identification
- If a sow cannot be identified a new number should be issued
- Some units slap gilts so a permanent identification is possible if the ear tag is lost
- Gilts entering the breeding herd are usually tagged with consecutive numbers. Herds often change tag colours or prefix digits based on intakes, this then matches the parity, or may use different colours based on different breeding systems within the herd

Preparation

- Tagging must take place with minimal stress to pigs and staff
- Set up a good handling system where tagging can be achieved as quickly and easily as possible
- Ensure the area is well lit and has a non-slip floor
- Tags should be of a suitable size and type for the size and animal
- Ensure that the correct pliers are available for the type of tag to be used
- Check tags and pliers are clean and in working order; if necessary ensure that antiseptic wipes or disinfectant solution are available to clean pliers and/or ears

- Tagging the sow/gilt in both ears means that if one tag is lost the remaining tag can still easily identify her

Outline of the work – gilts entering the herd

- Collect the correct tags and matching pliers
- Restrain the gilt in a suitable handling system
- If necessary clean the ear prior to tagging as infections can be caused by unhygienic practice
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions to fit the tag correctly
- Position the tag in the centre of the flat part of the ear avoiding visible veins and ridges of cartilage
- If placed too low or close to the edge the tag may be pulled out by ripping through the ear
- Clean the pliers after use and store them along with any unused tags in a clean place

Re-tagging when a tag has been lost

- This can usually take place through the original hole (unless the ear has been ripped), reducing the stress on the sow
- Many units carry out re-tagging at weaning when sows are regrouped
- If tags are frequently lost reassess your system and tagging practice, or make, or type of tag



Button tags are used on some units; double tagging reduces the risk of unknown sows



Organise your tagging equipment so it is nearby



Set up the tags and pliers



Carry out tagging with minimum stress

Reference documents

Pigs in the UK should be identified according to the necessary regulations, at the time of printing these were:

The Pigs (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 2007 England

Code of Recommendation for the Welfare of Livestock: Pigs