

## **Electronic identification: The key to improving margins and profitability in your flock**



**It's well known that the key to success in many areas of life is information. For sheep farmers, this holds equally true. But what is the knowledge that makes the difference and how do you achieve it?**

No one knows better than the individual farmer, just what it is he or she wants to know about the flock. Is it the average number of lambs born per ewe served? Is it the total weaned weight of lamb produced? Is it to know the ewes which had the most difficult lambings, the ones with colostrum, teat, and or birth problems? All these factors and many more are what sheep farmers would like to know in order to improve efficiency, performance and profits, never to mind just simply getting rid of those sheep contributing nothing to overall profitability.

But without detailed records, knowledge is difficult to attain in these areas.



The good news is that with the introduction of electronic tags farmers can develop detailed knowledge of individual animal performance in order to improve the performance of the whole flock.

While many farmers and breeders believe that individual recording of every sheep would be beneficial, there is still uncertainty about how to do it.

With the Select Sheepware Pocket Edition loaded onto a handheld electronic tag reader and a basic home computer, the recording and analysis of information is now vastly more feasible than it would have been with pen and paper just a few years ago.

### **A Workable System**

Critical to the success of the operation is finding a software and reader package which is practical, easy to work and which will cause minimal extra work at lambing time. With a number of software companies now providing high quality, easy to use sheep management software, there isn't a better time to look at what's available than now!

### **What Do You Want The System To Do?**

In order to plan just what you need, take a moment and decide what it is you want to record.

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## **EID systems for recording can be broken down into three groups.**



A simple system for picking up no more than a list of EID numbers when animals move on or off the farm. This list can be printed off easily to meet Department movement regulations – **that's where the wand or stick readers come in.** They don't record management or breeding events, just simply lists of EID numbers, recorded quickly and easily. This is the sort of system you might consider if you're buying and selling large numbers of store lambs, particularly if they're not all being moved through a Central Control Point.

**A hand held reader** to link lambs to their mothers at birth and record just a basic level of information. That's where the Agrident 350 type handheld comes in useful. It's designed to record very basic information, to allow the user to link lambs to their mothers, record the number of lambs born alive, the number dead and perform basic functions like record weights. These readers have little if any storage space in their memory to store historical data on the animals - you can't keep a sheep for example and see how many lambs she had last year.

## **The Psion Workabout type handheld, or a wand or stick reader linked via Bluetooth to a standard iPaq PDA or windows smartphone.**



These types of system allow for really detailed recording. At birth for example, you can record (depending of course on the capabilities of the software which has been supplied in the device) number of lambs alive, dead, lambing difficulty, including the ability to type you own comment in if you wish. Some of the software for these PDA type readers has simple drop down lists for breed, sex, lambing ease, motherability of the ewe, viability of the lambs etc. So to use these systems can be very simple.

The really big plus of the PDA type systems is that (again depending on the software supplied) it's likely that the PDA software will have the full history of every animal available – past lambing details, health history, comments entered, tupping details, etc. So if you're lambing an old ewe and she's having significant problems, a couple of taps on the screen and you can see immediately if this is a one off, or if she's had problems in the past. Such readers will, if the software is set up properly, also display significant information when recording events, for example when recording weighing information, the last weight may be shown, the weight gain per day since the last weighing, etc.

You can now buy new EID Psion readers for under £1000.00 and refurbished units are available for £800.00 or less! Low cost software solutions for small flocks and even a free version if you don't want to record management information, just simple flock movement details are available. The cost is not the issue, **it's the will to do the job!**

## **The End Result**

**Should be: good quality records, easy analysis of those records, productive management decisions on culling, breeding and selection, which together can significantly improve profitability!**