



CNGF's Process to Select Identifiers for Goats

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The goat sector in Canada is very diverse. There are goats raised for milk, meat and fiber to name the main production types. There are people who keep goats as pets, goats on hobby farms, and goats used for targeted browsing or weed control.

It is with this diversity in mind that the Canadian National Goat Federation (CNGF) has worked with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), producer representatives and consulted with national commodity groups and federal and provincial governments since 2002 to prepare the Canadian goat industry for mandatory national identification and traceability regulations expected to come into effect in 2018.

CNGF began by exploring and considering all options for goat identification, including microchipping, tattooing, tags, leg bands, and boluses. CNGF consulted extensively with producers, other commodity groups and governments, to examine each option while bearing in mind the needs of the entire goat sector as well as affordability.

CNGF discussed the option of microchipping with the CFIA at length. The option was eliminated by CFIA because of potential migration in the animal. With goat heads and tails being used as food by some ethnic groups, migration of a microchip in the ear or tail presents a food safety hazard.

Research by CNGF into boluses presented similar food safety hazards and potential animal health issues. From a food safety perspective, the hazard is the same as microchipping. While there may be producers whose goats never enter the food chain, changes in ownership and other factors would make it impractical and impossible to guarantee this. There is no method in place to verify that these goats do not enter the food chain at the end of their lives. A consumer finding a bolus or other physical hazard in their goat dish would cause immeasurable poor publicity and damage to the entire goat sector. From an animal health and welfare perspective, CNGF research revealed that a significant number of young goats die when boluses are inserted. In addition, boluses are not tamper evident, and could be transferred from a dead animal to a live one without any way of knowing that this has been done.

Finally, use of microchips and boluses as identification methods do not provide a visual way to verify whether the animal is in fact identified, but require a reader to verify that the animal is identified. Approval of either of these methods for even specific targeted goat owners would force others in the goat value chain to purchase costly readers to read ID numbers when animals are moved.

Other identification methods have been analyzed by the CNGF, including tattooing. Tattooing was not considered a practical ID method due to the digits fading, getting distorted over time, or completely disappearing. CFIA informed CNGF in writing that tattoos would not be considered as an official identification method for goats.

CNGF consulted with CFIA veterinarians on best ID methods for disease control, and it was affirmed that individual ID is needed to identify which goats are exposed in a disease situation. Individual ID and movement reporting, as opposed to a herd mark, could minimize impacts and limit response required in a disease traceback investigation, thereby protecting the entire goat sector.

There have been many opportunities over the years for producers to provide comments and get involved in the selection of identification methods to recommend for approval by the CFIA. In 2011, CNGF launched the voluntary National Goat Identification Program, soliciting producers to voluntarily test various tags on their goats and provide their feedback to CNGF. This feedback on identifiers would then be used by CNGF as they made recommendations for identifiers to CFIA.

CNGF was involved in the CFIA consultations in 2013 and 2015 on proposed regulatory changes that would require identification and traceability for goats. At these times as well as at all times during preparations for mandatory goat identification, CNGF invited producers to provide input and feedback, and submitted our own comments to the CFIA on behalf of the goat sector. CNGF has strengthened communications and developed strategies to reach goat owners who may be outside traditional goat or agriculture communication channels.

In 2014, CNGF established the National Goat Traceability Committee (NGTC), whose members are dairy, meat, and fibre producers. The mandate of the NGTC has been to consult widely with its industry counterparts and federal-provincial government representatives to develop a national goat traceability strategy. Members bring expertise about the opportunities, challenges and implications of traceability implementation for the Canadian goat industry. Throughout our work on traceability, CNGF and NGTC have strived to meet the diverse needs of the goat sector. The costs of implementing traceability will be borne by producers; hence, the cost of identifiers was an important consideration when CNGF recommended a select variety of identifiers for approval.

The CNGF has worked to provide identification options to meet the diverse needs of the goat industry. Characteristics of certain breeds will require tail tagging options - many producers in the goat dairy industry require RFID leg bands; and low value animals will require a very low cost identification option for producers. We are confident that the careful consideration and process we have followed for selection of identifiers will provide producers with a range of affordable options that will assist them in meeting expected regulations.

Draft changes to regulations that would require goat identification are expected to be published in Canada Gazette 1 in the coming months. There will be a 75 day comment period after publication during which stakeholders can provide written submissions to the CFIA. CNGF will be informing our members and producers when this comment period is open.

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