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## Ear Tags for Goats

All registered Boer goats – whether purebred or percentage – must be tattooed. This is fine for the purposes of permanent identification, but unless you have only a few animals, you will also need some means of identification you can read without having to catch the animal. Collars and tags work well for dairy animals, but a horned goat (or a branch or a stick) may catch a goat's collar and strangle it. Therefore, most meat goat breeders use ear tags.

Ear tags come in a number of different sizes and many colours. The best tags for goats are sized for sheep – cattle tags are much too big for goats. They can be ordered with printed numbers, or blank to be written on with a special pen. Some breeders use different colours to identify males from females, different years of birth, purebreds from percentages, degree of purity, or whatever makes sense for that production unit.

The tags consist of two parts (male and female), which are set into a piercing tool somewhat like a pair of pliers. The ear is inserted between the two parts of the tag, and when the pliers are tightly closed, the ear is pierced, and the male part of the tag becomes locked in the female part.

Tags should be inserted as high as possible on the ear (close to the head), just below the fold, to ensure

the best retention rate. The ear seems to be thicker just below where it folds downwards. Avoid large ridges of cartilage, bigger blood vessels, and the animal's tattoos when selecting a spot to tag.

It is best to tag kids when they are very young in order to reduce the chance of a mistake in identification, and to promote faster healing. Kids will struggle and call when the piercing is done – but it is a fast process that seems to have little lasting effect on the animal when done well. An assistant can be useful in holding the animals.

Prepare the ear by removing dirt or manure, then swabbing both sides with alcohol or another disinfectant recommended by your veterinarian. Similarly, swab the two halves of the tag. Locate the target spot on the ear, and position the pliers. If you are using a tag with a button on one side, put the numbered half on the top (outside) of the ear so that it will be visible. Perform the tagging with a strong, quick movement. The kids will cry and struggle. Release the tag from the tagger (practice this before you start tagging – it can be tricky) – and that's it!

Be sure to record the animal's information (dam, sex, etc) and the tag number right away for your ongoing records.



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