VETERINARY SERVICES MEMORANDUM NO. 578.12

TO: VS Management Team (VSMT)

FROM: John R. Clifford
Deputy Administrator

SUBJECT: Distribution and Use of Official Identification Ear Tags 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 ear tags used for cattle or bison with numbers conforming to the National Uniform Eartagging System (NUES). This revised memorandum clarifies the use of NUES ear tags, expands the distribution of these tags directly to producers, and clarifies how NUES ear tags 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 ear tags will be administered.

This memorandum does not pertain to the use or distribution of official ear tags that are not part of the NUES numbering system format. Ear tags 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 ear tags 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 ear tags 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 ear tags 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 ear tags 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 ear tags are responsible for:

A. Maintaining the security of the NUES ear tags and properly using them.

B. Reporting any loss, theft, or deliberate or accidental misuse of the ear tags 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 ear tags 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 veterinarians\(^1\) 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 calfhood 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.

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\(^1\) 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.
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
was initially applied. Situations for which tag removal may be considered include:

(1) Deterioration of the ear tag 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 ear tag at a slightly different location in the ear.
(3) Inoperability of the electronic component of a radio frequency (RF) ear tag.
(4) Incompatibility with the management system of an RF ear tag.
(5) Unacceptable functionality of the management system of an RF ear tag.
(6) Malfunction of the electronic component of an RF ear tag.

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 ear tag, visual metal ear tag, or RFID ear tag).
(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 ear tag (e.g., visual plastic ear tag, visual metal ear tag, or RFID ear tag).

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

1. Obtaining NUDES ear tags through the State in which the Tribes are located, and working with the State to maintain appropriate records;

2. Obtaining NUDES ear tags through the appropriate VS Area Office, and working with the Area Office to maintain appropriate records; or

3. Issuing Tribal-specific NUDES ear tags to Tribal producers, and maintaining records according to the needs of the Tribe.

C. VS responsibilities when NUDES ear tags are distributed for use outside disease programs:
1. Maintaining a list of manufacturers authorized by APHIS to produce NUES ear tags and the ear tags that are APHIS approved for each manufacturer.

2. Maintaining sufficient inventory of standard metal silver-colored NUES ear tags 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 ear tag distribution method.

4. Providing and maintaining the Animal Identification Management System for reporting the distribution of NUES ear tags 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 ear tag 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 ear tags 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 ear tag numbers and recording information about the herd in which the ear tags 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 ear tags are applied.
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.

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

Attachment
## Attachment

**State, Tribe, and Territory Codes for the National Uniform Eartagging System**

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<th>State, Territory, Tribe</th>
<th>Postal and Numeric Codes</th>
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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.