

National Animal Identification System: Animal Identification Number (AIN) Tags

In 2004, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) announced the implementation of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). The NAIS is a voluntary, cooperative Federal-State-industry program, providing a standardized information system for Federal and State animal-health authorities to use in responding to animal-disease events in the United States. The NAIS has three components: premises registration, animal identification, and animal tracking. Premises registration is ongoing. APHIS has recently approved manufacturers of NAIS animal tags allowing producers to participate in the second component of the NAIS.


Basic Requirements of AIN Tags

All AIN tags are:

- Designed for one-time use and tamper evident,
- Unalterable,
- Able to be read at a distance of 30 inches, and
- Able to remain on an animal for the duration of its life.

Basic Characteristics of AIN Tags

AIN tags have several other distinguishing characteristics. They are imprinted with:

- An animal identification number that is a unique 15 digit number starting with 840 (the country code for the United States),
- The U.S. shield ,
- The term "unlawful to remove," and
- The manufacturer's logo or trademark.

Tags with button front and button back pieces must have the above information printed on the piece that, when applied, is on the outside of the animal's ear. This piece is commonly referred to as the "back" of a two-piece tag. By having the imprinted information on the back, it will make visual reading easier.

The de-facto standard for some species is a visual eartag. If a tag meets the imprinting criteria

listed above, it may have radio frequency identification (RFID) technology encased in the visual tag. This technology is considered supplemental identification, since the visual tag remains the animal's official identifier. If a tag contains RFID technology, it must have all 15 digits of the AIN printed on the tag piece that contains the transponder.

How To Obtain an AIN Tag and When To Apply It

In order to obtain AIN tags, producers must first register their premises and obtain a premises identification number (PIN). This requirement exists because all AIN tags are linked to a producer's PIN in the AIN management system. Premises registration is currently free and is being carried out by all 50 States, two territories, and five tribes. A list of State and tribal animal identification coordinators is available at <http://www.usda.gov/nais>, under the sidebar "Contact Your State or Tribe."

Once producers have registered their premises, they may purchase AIN tags from an AIN tag manager or reseller. Only AIN tag managers and resellers are authorized to provide AIN devices for producers. Producers should contact authorized AIN manufacturers for the AIN tag managers and resellers in their area. A list of AIN manufacturers is available at <http://nais.aphis.usda.gov/ainmngt>. Click on the "List ID Devices" in the left sidebar. Authorized AIN tags will have "NAIS" listed in the "Approval Status" column.

Since the AIN tag is referenced to a PIN, producers should take care not to transfer their tags or make them available to other producers.

Producers may attach the AIN tags at their convenience and at the time most suitable to their operation, but before an animal leaves their premises.

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