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Nevada Sheep Ranch Moves to Electronic ID

(By Jay McCown, Ranger ID Technologies)

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Leaving the small town of Yerington Nevada, we traveled south along a dusty unmarked desert road for more than 30 minutes before we entered the gates of the Rafter 7 sheep ranch. Cresting a rocky hill we descended into a beautiful desert oasis which sprawled across a vast remote river valley surrounded by rugged snow-capped mountains. This northern Nevada ranch, with its majestic views and historic buildings is ground zero for developing one of the nations most efficient and high quality wool producing operations.

These unique Merino and Rambouillet crossbred flocks are specially adapted to the climate and forage resources available on these western arid rangelands. Over the last two years, the management of the Rafter 7 Ranch, in cooperation with the University of Nevada and the Nevada State Department of Agriculture have further collaborated to optimize the health and genetics of these flocks by individually tagging each year group of lambs with USDA approved electronic identification tags for scrapie. As Tom Filbin, the Rafter 7 ranch manager told us, "Our flock is certified scrapie free, and use of the electronic scrapie tag has allowed the ranch to move closer to automating the individual processing of every sheep on the ranch.

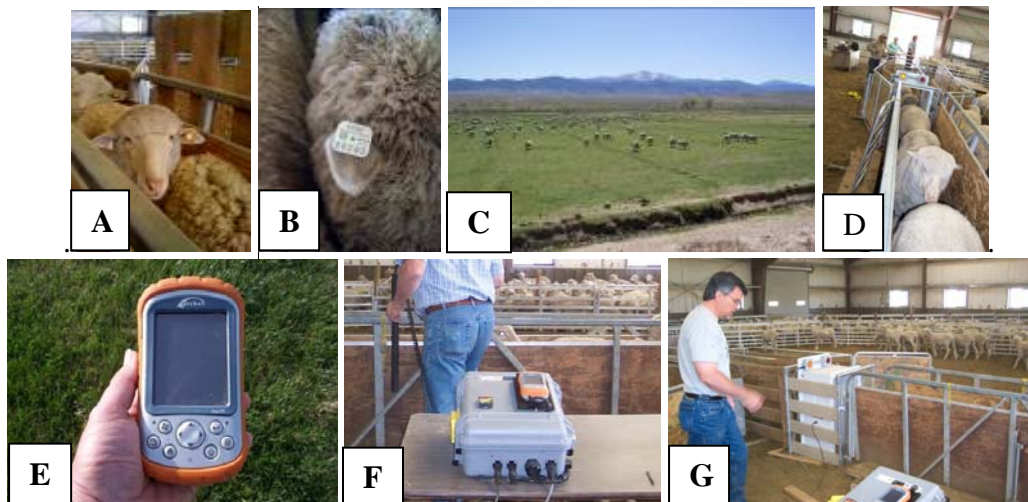
The main goal of our trip to Rafter 7 was to evaluate the new Destron-Fearing electronic ear tag/square back panel sets to determine if the tags had any ill effects on the health of any sheep, and to evaluate tag retention characteristics, and tag read performance. Each electronic ear tag and back panel is easily applied using a common ear tag applicator. The new back panel provides a clearly readable visual number that corresponds to the electronic ID number, providing redundant identification for each individual animal.

During the previous year, 515 lambs had been tagged with the new Destron e-tag and our goal was to process the flock as thoroughly and quickly as we could. To expedite the process we utilized a commercial electronic ID scanner system (developed by Ranger ID Technologies) equipped with a combination portal antenna and hand scanner unit, wirelessly connected to a portable Archer Data logging computer with FaST EID software. The flock of 515 sheep were processed in groups of 20 to 25, and allowed to move thru the scanners as the veterinarian inspected each animal's ear tag site for possible swelling or dermatitis.

Only two sheep exhibited mild dermatitis, but no swelling or other conditions were noted. Tag retention was excellent, as only one sheep had lost its tag. Further inspection showed that the tag had been applied much too close to the ear tip (should be applied about 1/3 of the way from the base of the ear). A total of 513 sheep were successfully interrogated, (one energetic sheep leaped past the scanner like an Olympic hurdler) out of a total of 514 tagged sheep, so tag read performance was essentially 100%.

The new Destron Fearing e-tag passed the test. It was clear that both the Rafter 7 management and the Nevada state representatives were satisfied with the electronic scrapie tag evaluation. By using electronic ID technology, all 515 sheep were individually identified and physically inspected in less than one hour. I think that Holly Pecetti, the Nevada ID coordinator summed it up best: "Having to manually process over 500 sheep using the old visual scrapie tag numbers was not an option she wanted to contemplate. Using modern RFID technology really saved the day".

Tom Filbin soon hopes to expand the breeding flock to over 2000 ewes. This means an increased number of rams and ewes available to improve the sheep industry in the Western United States. Using individual electronic identification will make his job that much easier.



(A. Scrapie tagged sheep) (B. Square back EID Tag) (C. Rafter 7 Ranch) (D. Ranger Tunnel antenna) (E. Archer Data Collection Computer) (F. Ranger Integrated Reader System) (G. Ranger Tunnel Antenna)

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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