

Don't Forget the Chip:
A review of the guidelines for microchips in Alpacas
By Amber Da Silva, DVM

While radio frequency identification (RFID) has been around for decades, the application of the technology continues to expand. Implanted microchips offer a safe, effective, and permanent way to identify alpacas.

Reliability and Ease

"I like them better than tattoos," says April Fogarty, a veterinary technician and alpaca farmer in Woodstock, Connecticut. "Microchips are easy to implant and there is less room for error since tattoos can fade and become unreadable over time." Ms. Fogarty uses the Datamars™ microchips. She implants the microchips when the crias are about three months old. She is pleased with how well the animals tolerate the procedure and how reliable the microchips are. "The microchip never comes back out with the syringe so there is less room for error. It makes me feel better when I'm putting these into my personal pets that I'm breeding and that I've paid money for."

Christina Murdock, DVM, owner of LAVender Veterinary Services, a mixed-animal mobile practice in Concord, New Hampshire, recommends microchips for all her patients. She uses the Datamars™ microchips in her practice. "My patients have done very well for microchips. These chips are more comfortable due to the smaller diameter of the needle."

Microchips have many advantages over other modes of identification. Having a permanent and unique identifier can help to deter theft and protect breeders, buyers, and sellers from fraud. If an animal is lost or stolen, there is a better chance of being reunited with their rightful owner if the animal has a microchip. With the ease of implantation, comfort for the animal, and the reliability that they offer, microchips are quickly becoming the preferred method of identification.

Unique Identification

According to the Alpaca Owners Association, Inc. (AOA), there is no requirement that an alpaca have a microchip in order to be registered with their organization. If the alpaca is microchipped, the microchip number will be included in the registration. AOA does, however, require that all alpacas that participate in AOA-sanctioned shows be microchipped. This confirms the identity of each animal entering the show.

Transporters may also require animals to have microchips to match the paperwork they have been given. To export alpacas from the United States to Canada, the animal must be permanently and uniquely identified with an electronic microchip.

Microchipping Protocol
Ensure the identity of the alpaca.
Scan for an existing chip with a universal scanner.
Scan chip to make sure it is readable and that the number matches the number printed on the barcode sticker.
Implant chip below the skin at the base of the left ear in sheep, llamas, and alpacas, and in the left tail fold/web in goats.
After implantation, scan the microchip to ensure it is still readable.

Choosing a microchip from a reputable company, such as Datamars™, is key. Datamars™ microchips conform to the ISO standards 11784 and 11785. The Datamars SLIM microchips have a revolutionary polymer encasement instead of the traditional glass encasement and are ½ the weight of standard glass microchips. This helps to lessen the chance of migration. Datamars chips can be read by any ISO compliant scanner and are certified by The International Committee for Animal Recording (ICAR). ICAR is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) that promotes the standardization and improvement of animal identification and recording.

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