Pork producers are closing in on a significant date for the industry’s Swine ID Plan. As of Jan. 1, 2015, individual identification of breeding stock headed to harvest will transition from backtags to the use of official, USDA-approved eartags. The eartags, called official premises identification number (PIN) tags, must be applied on the farm to individual breeding swine being marketed into harvest channels to link the animal to the sending premises. PIN tags are not required for feeder pigs, growers or market hogs.

In support of the Swine ID Plan, most major U.S. packers and processors will require PIN tags as a condition of sale for breeding stock beginning Jan. 1. To date, packers that will require the tags include: Johnsonville, Hillshire Brands, Calihan Pork Processors, Bob Evans Farms, Wampler’s Farm Sausage, Pine Ridge Farms, Pioneer Packing Co., Pork King Packing and Abbyland Pork Pack.

“The official PIN tags are a significant improvement over backtags that are not imprinted with a premises identifier and are prone to come off,” said Patrick Webb, DVM, director of swine health for the Pork Checkoff. “When used in breeding stock, the official PIN tags will enhance pre-harvest traceability and national disease surveillance.”

**PIN Tags Play Key Role in Disease Outbreak**

Sows and boars entering harvest channels are often commingled, sorted and shipped with animals from other sources. Individual identification is essential for targeted surveillance and rapid and accurate traceback for diseases that could affect trade and commerce, such as pseudorabies or Foot-and-Mouth Disease.

“If there is a disease issue, PIN tags could expedite the investigation, identify the site and aid officials in quickly containing the outbreak to help limit potential damage for the producer and the rest of the industry,” Webb said. “The official PIN tags demonstrate to our trading partners that we have a valid pre-harvest traceability system. With more than 25 percent of U.S. pork production going to foreign buyers, that assurance helps keep export markets viable.”

He added, “The official tags also play a role in the industry’s Pork Quality Assurance® programs, providing an excellent way to identify sows and boars during production and to keep accurate treatment and movement records.”

“**What Is a PIN?**

A premises identification number (PIN) will locate a specific animal production site. The standardized PIN is a USDA-allocated, seven-character alphanumeric code, with the right-most character being a check digit. For example: AB23456. Note that PINs are not the same as location identification numbers (LIDs) administered through a state’s or tribe’s internal system.
To ensure an effective and efficient disease surveillance and traceability program, all pork production sites, regardless of size or type, need to secure a premises identification number (PIN). Fortunately, the process is quite simple.

**Step 1:** Contact your state animal health official’s office and talk to the identification program coordinator. The contact information is available through the office’s website. You also can call (800) 456-7675, and the Pork Checkoff’s Service Center will point you in the right direction.

**Step 2:** Each production site will need its own PIN. Once you’re ready to call the state’s identification program coordinator to get your PIN, you will need to provide the following information for each production site:

- Name of entity or company
- Contact information for the owner or other appropriate individual
- Type of operation
- Street address, city, state and ZIP code
- Telephone number

Together with the state animal health authority, USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) will retain those basic records. Most states will include some additional information, such as the livestock species housed on the site, and some will have an optional category for the site’s latitude and longitude. The number of livestock housed on the site will not be required by any entity.

With the data retained by USDA, only animal health officials have access in response to a disease investigation or emergency. The information is exempt from the Freedom of Information Act.

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**Premises Registration Is Easy**

PINs benefit pork producers and the industry as a whole by improving:

- Nationally coordinated swine health programs
- Disease surveillance
- Traceability
- Record keeping
- Pork Quality Assurance® Plus

Additionally, PINs play a role in national emergency preparedness programs, according to the Pork Checkoff’s Patrick Webb, DVM.

“PINs act as a 911 address for producers’ pork production sites, which would help support rapid communication…”

— Patrick Webb, Pork Checkoff

For more details, go to pork.org.

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**PIN Tags Provide Multiple Benefits**

Premises identification numbers (PINs) reach beyond the efforts to identify cull breeding stock headed to harvest; they also are part of the industry’s larger swine identification program. Combined, these animal ID efforts illustrate to domestic and foreign customers that U.S. pork producers are committed to a world-class, pre-harvest traceability system. But at the producer level, PINs provide many other benefits. Here’s a snapshot.

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PINs will play a role in national emergency preparedness programs, according to the Pork Checkoff’s Patrick Webb, DVM.

“PINs act as a 911 address for producers’ pork production sites, which would help support rapid communication and response during agricultural emergencies, such as floods, blizzards and disease outbreaks,” Webb said.

“PINs will also play a role in disease surveillance for producers who choose to enroll in the Secure Pork Supply Plan, which is currently under development,” Webb added.

The objective of the Secure Pork Supply Plan is to help maintain business continuity if a foreign animal disease surfaces in the United States. For more details, go to pork.org.

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[Image: pork.org or the Pork Checkoff Service Center @ (800) 456-7675]
Once you have applied the official PIN tag to a sow or boar, you’re done. The tag should never be removed from an animal or given a different official tag. If an animal is moved to another site inside the production system, you do not need to apply another PIN tag.

“That’s important to producers implementing parity segregation,” said the Pork Checkoff’s Patrick Webb, DVM. “You do not need to apply an official PIN tag for every breeding site. The key for producers is to maintain detailed records.”

Q: What records do I need to keep?

A: You will need to record the following details:
- Date the gilt, sow or boar was tagged
- Number of the official PIN tag applied (both PIN and management number if present)
- Number of any other identification present on the gilt, sow or boar when entering the premises
- Date the animal moved into the premises and the PIN of the source location
- Date the animal moved out of the premises and the PIN of the destination
- If replacing a lost official PIN tag, the date the animal was re-tagged, the number of the new official PIN tag and the one that was lost (if known)

Q: How long do I need to keep the records?

A: You will need to archive the records for three years, along with the animal’s production records. This step is important for disease surveillance and traceability efforts if there’s ever a need for review.

Q: “Breeding swine” can be interpreted many ways. How do I define it for the PIN tag program?

A: USDA defines breeding swine as sexually intact swine over six months of age, although there is a gray area regarding heavy gilts or young boars not selected for breeding. Talk to your buyers about where those types of animals will be marketed. If there’s a chance they will go to a sow/boar plant, an official PIN tag should be applied to ensure full value for the animal.

Q: When is the best time to apply an official PIN tag?

A: As long as the official PIN tag is in the ear when animals leave the breeding farm or boar stud for harvest, you can decide when to apply it. Some systems use PIN tags as a part of their management program and tag gilts when they are selected for the breeding herd. Others do it just before the animal is marketed.
Inside: Tips on preparing to meet the Jan. 1 deadline for PIN tags.

PIN Tags: Important to You and to the Industry

Raising healthy hogs and producing a safe, wholesome and nutritious product is a driving force for pork producers. Increasingly, traceability is an important part of fulfilling both aspects. Starting Jan. 1, 2015, most major packers handling breeding stock will require official premises identification number (PIN) tags as a condition of sale. Making that simple transition can benefit individual producers and the industry, according to Craig Rowles, DVM, a National Pork Board member and an Iowa pork producer.

“We began applying official PIN tags last March to incoming gilts as part of our normal sow production record system,” Rowles said. “We simply substituted the tags for our regular eartag program. It’s important for producers to determine what works best for them to ensure that all cull breeding animals are tagged prior to moving to harvest.”

As a veterinarian, Rowles recognizes the importance of targeted disease surveillance and notes that the official PIN tags allow for more effective and cost-efficient monitoring. The tags also enhance pre-harvest traceability, which not only meets pork customers’ growing demands, but also could help keep international markets open should a disease of concern, such as Foot-and-Mouth Disease, occur.

“We live in a world that demands greater transparency and certification,” Rowles said. “As producers, we have an obligation to adhere to our ethical principles and to provide a safe and wholesome product. Using official PIN tags that provide greater disease surveillance efficiency and traceability is part of that obligation.”