



A list you don't want to be on

USDA maintains a list of people who have shipped cattle with antibiotic residues and the plants that purchased them.

by Ronald F. Eustice

THERE is a rising level of scrutiny by government regulators, the media, and the general public about the use of antibiotics and antimicrobials in animal agriculture, and we can expect the debate to get more intense during the months ahead. It's important to know that, by law, no meat or milk sold in the United States is allowed to contain antibiotic residues that violate FDA standards.

What's the issue?

Currently, there is an aggressive campaign to ban the use of certain antibiotics or antimicrobials for use in farm animals. Critics claim the U.S. livestock industry has fed medically important antibiotics to chickens, pigs, and cattle to accelerate their growth and weight gain. A report by the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production (www.pcifap.org) claims antibiotic use on farms has created antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria. Groups such as Union of Concerned Scientists, Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS), and Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW) have joined the Pew Commission in efforts to ban nontherapeutic use of antibiotics.

The American Medical Association also has taken a position in support of restricting antibiotic use in farm animals. Several times, legislation called the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act, has been introduced in Congress. This bill would prevent farmers from using antibiotics on animals for disease prevention. The legislation would phase out seven classes of antibiotics for animal use.

Efforts to ban the use of antibiotics must be based on sound science, and efforts to ban antibiotic and antimicrobial use in the absence of risk assessment could be harmful to both human and animal health.

The health and well-being of animals is a top priority for all of us. Antibiotics are an important and necessary tool in protecting animal health and well-being. That said, responsible use of antibiotics must be a top

The author is executive director of the Minnesota Beef Council.

priority for the cattle industry.

There is a list called the FSIS Residue Violation Information System list that all of us involved in animal agriculture should be aware of. The list, which no responsible livestock producer should be on, can be viewed at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Chemistry/index.asp>. Click on a date under "Same Source Supplier-Residue Violator List." The 100-and-some-page list includes nearly 1,000 names of people who are in violation of antibiotic use and dozens of businesses that have purchased their cattle. Not only does this list present a negative image for the cattle industry, it is a target for greater scrutiny from industry critics.

This is an issue that must be taken seriously. The reputation of individual producers and the future of the entire livestock industry is at stake.

The FSIS Residue Violation Information System list includes the names, addresses, and phone numbers of producers who have sent animals to market that have tested positive for antibiotic residues. Also included is the name of the packing plant or livestock market receiving the animals, the type of animals (beef, dairy, veal, goats), the type of residue found, location of the residue (usually kidney or liver), and the violation and tolerance level.

How do you get on the list?

The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) conducts random tests to ensure beef products entering the food supply do not contain antibiotic levels that violate FDA standards. This testing protocol has been updated continuously since its inception in 1967.

If an animal tests positive for antibiotic residues, the carcass and offal are held, pending an additional test to confirm the residue. If the second tests confirm a violation, the carcass is destroyed, and the producer is not paid for the animal. The violation is reported to the USDA/FSIS, and the producer's name and the name of the packing plant or livestock market receiving the animal is placed on the FSIS Residue Violation Information System list for a 12-month period.

The law requires that the animal's owner be

notified of the violation. I spoke to the head cattle buyer of a major packing company to learn more about the procedure used to prevent repeat violations. While procedures may vary from plant to plant, here is what I learned.

The owner of an animal with a violative residue is notified that cattle originating from that farm will be subject to enhanced inspection and testing. The plant requires that the producer receives Beef Quality Assurance or Dairy Beef Quality Assurance training and obtains a certificate signed by a veterinarian or authorized trainer before cattle will be accepted from the farm. Once the producer has received training, cattle will be accepted from the farm. However, cattle from that farm will be placed under greater scrutiny for one year. While second violations are rare, the consequence is refusal by the plant to accept any cattle from that producer.


To stay off the list

The best way to stay off the FSIS list is to follow check-off-funded Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) Guidelines for Responsible Use of Antibiotics which clearly state how these products should be used.

The guidelines specifically outline the appropriate use of antibiotics:

- Prevent disease through management by emphasizing animal care, biosecurity, hygiene, and health maintenance.
- Establish a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) for any use of a prescription drug.
- Identify health problems early and accurately.
- Use antibiotics correctly.
- Select antibiotics only if you suspect an infection.
- Avoid using antibiotics that are important in human medicine.
- Use a narrow spectrum of antimicrobials whenever possible.
- Read the label, and follow withdrawal times.
- Treat the fewest number of animals possible.
- Keep accurate records. A good record keeping system includes the following:
 - Identify all animals treated.
 - Record drugs used.
 - Put down dates treated. If more than once, record first and last days of treatment.
 - Record dosage (amount) used.
- Always review treatment records before shipping an animal to ensure proper meat and milk withdrawal have been met.
- FDA recommends that treatment records should be kept a minimum of three years.
- Antibiotic use always should be limited to prevent or control disease and should not be used if the principal intent is to improve performance.

For more information on BQA, visit www.bqa.org. The Minnesota Beef Council (MBC) has produced several brochures and posters on Responsible Antibiotic Use in English and Spanish. Contact the MBC at (952) 854-6980 or ron@mnbeef.org.

Make prevention a priority. New tests will be even more sophisticated. Responsible dairy producers know that healthy animals are the foundation of safe food. Disease prevention to keep cows well is the key to their success. Use as few antibiotics as possible to protect public health, and be good stewards of the environment. Misuse of antibiotics is a bad animal health decision, a bad public health decision, and a bad business decision. 



- Beef quality guidelines: www.bqa.org
- Minnesota Beef Council: www.mnbeef.org