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Information for Today's Agri-business Professional

New VFD regulations will affect many dairy operations

The concern over antibiotic resistance is about to hit home for livestock producers. Starting January 1, 2017, food-animal producers will need to comply with new federal regulations regarding antibiotics in livestock feed.

The Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) will change the way some antibiotics are administered in feed. It also will require compliance and documentation on the part of animal producers, veterinarians and feed manufacturers.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is responsible for overseeing the use of human and veterinary antibiotics in the United States. The government's goals for this new set of regulations are to:

- Promote judicious use of antibiotics
- Protect public health; and
- Help limit the development of antibiotic resistance.

The VFD has been developed in response to growing concerns about antibiotic resistance in both human and veterinary medicine.

What the VFD covers, and what it does not

If you feed medicated milk replacer, like more than 60% of your fellow U.S. dairy producers, the new VFD rules will impact your operation if your medication is oxytetracycline and neomycin, two antibiotics commonly added to milk replacer. So, too, will chlortetracycline, which often is added to calf and heifer dry feed.

All of these antibiotics are classified as "medically important" drugs by the FDA. That means they are used in both human and veterinary medicine, so the FDA wants more oversight of their use on the veterinary side.

Other drugs that often are added to feed will not be impacted by the new VFD regulations. Examples are ionophores, anthelmentics, beta agonists, larvacides and coccidiostats. For a complete list of impacted drugs, see [insert URL/link to list].

Use of medically important antibiotics will be allowed for therapeutic uses only, and may only be used when there is an established veterinary-client-patient-relationship (VCPR) and a VFD has been issued. Feeding medically important antibiotics for performance enhancement or growth promotion will no longer be allowed. That means continuous feeding of medicated milk replacers performance enhancement or growth promotion will no longer be available after December 31, 2016.

Feeding milk replacer that is enhanced with medically important antibiotics will be permitted only for disease treatment for a short period of time. For example, the common milk replacer medication combination of oxytetracyline and neomycin will be allowable only for 7 to 14 days, in a 1:1 concentration at a dose of 10 mg/lb. of bodyweight.

Medications added to water will not fall under the VFD. These products still will be allowed, but will require a veterinarian's prescription. They must be accessed through veterinary channels, and will no longer be available through retail outlets like feed and farm stores.

VFD document management

The new VFD regulations will apply to any farm using feed products containing medically important antibiotics. One person on that farm should be responsible for working with the herd veterinarian on VFD compliance, and maintaining VFD records.

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The VFD form is typically a one-page document, produced in triplicate, which is issued by the herd's veterinarian. One copy should be held on the farm, another by the veterinarian, and the third by the farm's feed distributor. The document needs to be renewed by the veterinarian at least every 6 months, and held by all parties for 2 years. The expiration date of the VFD can vary. Record keeping can be in either written or electronic form.

Veterinarians may not use extra-label applications when writing VFD orders. All medically important antibiotics added to feed must be approved, conditionally approved, or indexed by the FDA as VFD drugs. These medications also must be used only according to their labeled species, indication, dosage and feeding duration.

Moving forward

With the impending removal of some medicated milk replacers from the market, many producers are wondering what, if any, alternatives they may have.

While some antibiotic options are being eliminated, there are many other milk-replacer enhancements available to support calf health, immune function and performance. These additives include essential oils, direct-fed microbials, coccidiostats, maternal-colostrum-derived immunoglobulins, egg derived immunoglobulins and a variety of yeast derivatives. Many are available in both prepared milk replacers, and in add-packs that can be mixed with milk replacer or whole milk. Work closely with your nutritional advisors and veterinarian to determine which options best fit your management program and calf-rearing goals.

Your relationship with your veterinarian also will be critical to successfully navigating the transition to VFD regulations since you must have a valid VCPR. Don't wait until December to start planning for the change. Among the details you'll need to cover, be sure you have completely worked through any inventory of medicated milk replacers containing antibiotics for growth promotion, as these products will be illegal and have to be destroyed after January 1, 2017.

Complying with any new procedures can be time-consuming and a change of routine. But the VFD is an important step in demonstrating that production agriculture takes antibiotics seriously, and that we are doing our part to use them responsibly.

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