



The Veterinary Feed Directive

What Producers Should Know about Antimicrobial Use in Feed

The use of antibiotics in feed for food-producing animals has come under scrutiny over the past few years. This is largely due to growing issues with bacteria developing resistance to antibiotics that are important in treating human infections. Several classes of antibiotics are used to treat disease in both people and animals. To ensure judicious use of shared-use antimicrobials in feed, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has placed these drugs under veterinary supervision. Effective January 1, 2017, medically important feed-grade antimicrobial drugs will no longer be labeled for growth promotion. Many antibiotics now available over the counter for use in feed will require authorization from a veterinarian in the form of a veterinary feed directive (VFD).

Definition

A veterinary feed directive (VFD) is a written statement authorizing the use of a medically important antibiotic in or on the feed. (This includes milk and milk replacer.) The order contains contact information for the veterinarian and client, location of the animals, order approval date, expiration date, name of the drug, type and number of animals fed, indication for the drug, level of the drug in the feed, any withdrawal or special instructions, number of refills if ordered, proper statement indicating no off-label use, and veterinarian's signature.

Veterinary Client Patient Relationship (VCPR)

To purchase feed containing a medically important antibiotic, the producer must obtain a veterinary feed directive from a veterinarian licensed to practice in the state in which the animals to be fed reside. The producer and veterinarian must have an ongoing working relationship, referred to as a Veterinary Client Patient Relationship (VCPR). To initiate a VCPR, the veterinarian must be familiar with the producer's operation, assume responsibility for making medical decisions about the animals involved, and have made medically timely visits to the premise. The producer agrees to follow the veterinarian's directions, and the veterinarian must be available for follow up. Through this agreement, the local veterinarian acts as the producer's partner and guide during the transition.

VFD Drugs

VFD drugs are antibiotics intended for use in or on animal feed that require supervision of a licensed veterinarian. The most common drugs affected are the tetracyclines (chlortetracycline, oxytetracycline), sulfonamides, tylosin, neomycin, and virginiamycin. The classes of drugs not affected are the ionophores, babermycins, bacitracin, tiamulin, and coccidiosis treatments (such as Decoxx and Corid). The producer must obtain a VFD if drugs not affected by the rule are fed in combination with a VFD drug (Rumensin/Tylan). VFD drugs can only be used under the specific FDA-approved label directions, which state the indication (treatment or control of a disease), dose (the amount fed each day), and duration (days the animals are fed the drug). Producers should understand that only approved combinations of drugs can be fed. Extra label use of feed medication is not permitted under any circumstances. Veterinarians can only issue a VFD for labeled directions.

Expiration Date and Duration

The veterinary feed directive includes an expiration date. The expiration date is not the same as duration of use, which is the period of time during which the animals should be fed the VFD drug for the label indication. An example of this is feeding Aureomycin at 10 mg/lb body weight (dose) for not more than 5 days (duration) to treat bacterial pneumonia in calves (indication). The expiration is the last day of the authorization to feed a VFD. The FDA has set the maximum expiration period on a veterinary feed directive at six months. Some VFD medications expire in a much shorter time. If there is VFD feed on hand past the expiration date, the producer must obtain a new order to continue to feed it legally.

Record Keeping

The veterinarian makes three copies of the order, keeping the original and providing a copy to both the feed distributor and the producer. The producer may receive the document in hard copy or electronic form and must keep the order on file for 2 years from the date issued. The document must be provided on request if an FDA inspection occurs.

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