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Drug Use in Food Animals

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Producers should be aware that there are only three ways to legally obtain and use antibiotics and other drugs in food animals. The first, and most common source, is over the counter drugs, labeled for specific uses. In using these products the producer is limited strictly to the dosage, routes, animal and disease condition listed on the label. He cannot legally use it in any other way.

These same guidelines must be applied to all feed additive medications as well. Even your veterinarian cannot prescribe feed additives to be used in any way other than that listed on the label.

The second method of obtaining drugs is as an "Extra Label Use Drug." Your veterinarian must be involved with this process and know your animals and situation and prepare a specific label to direct you in the use of the drug, including a withdrawal time. This use only applies when other approved (labeled) drugs are not available for the diagnosed condition or where they are found ineffective.

The third route for obtaining drugs is on a prescription basis from your veterinarian. These drugs are approved for use in the class of animal being treated, but your veterinarian must give you further directions and instructions on the specific use of the product.

An excellent reference resource is available to both veterinarians and producers and is called the Food Animal Residue Avoidance Databank (FARAD). There are 3 regional offices that can be contacted by telephone for information on drugs available, approved uses and withdrawal times. The locations and telephone numbers are:

Florida 904-392-4085
Illinois 217-333-3611
California 916-752-7507

Publications are also available from this same source, which lists all of the drugs approved for a specific class of food animal or a combined volume which covers all food animals.

A number of commercial kits are now available for use in testing of milk or urine for drug residues. Some of these can be used on the farm to determine the status of an individual animal that has been treated to be sure the food product is free of any residues prior to marketing. Some are screening tests...
When using any drugs in food producing animals, follow these precautionary management steps to avoid residues:

1. Establish a quality assurance program related to the food animals you produce.
2. Use only FDA approved products.
3. Store and administer all drugs properly.
4. Identify treated animals.
6. Observe label withdrawal times and recognize that a severely ill animal may require an extended withdrawal period.
7. Test for residues if there is any question.
8. Educate employees on drug administration practices and the importance of preventing drug residues.