

Preventing drug residues

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UNIVERSITY PARK — In
December of 1982, a survey was
taken of Wisconsin dairymen who
had experienced a drug residue
violation in a calf they had sold
during the year. The purpose of the
survey was to determine cause of,
attitude toward, and possible
solutions to the drug residue
problem in bob veal dairy calves,
which are calves slaughtered at
less than 30 days of age.
In answer to the question, "Did

you inform the buyer that the calf
had been treated?", the following
responses were obtained:

- "We never thought about it because the calf was very healthy. We gave it a pill so it wouldn't get scours in shipping."
- "I only gave the calf a couple of pills. I didn't think there would be a residue."
- "I shipped the calf without knowing my wife give it medication."
- "The wrong calf was given medication. I didn't know the one sold was medicated."
- "We thought it would go for a feeder, and forgot about the pill."
- "I didn't think it would show."

These answers show that many producers still don't realize that even one pill can cause a residue and that the instructions for withdrawal times should always be followed.

Many young calves — both heifers and bulls — go directly to slaughter from the auctions barn. The responses to the second question, "Were you surprised it went to slaughter?", show a lack of awareness in the calf marketing industry:

- "I thought it would go for replacement." "It was a heifer."
- "I was surprised someone didn't buy the heifer calf to raise as a replacement." and

- "Because it looked good for a replacement"

The following remarks were made when respondents were asked for any other information or comments.

- "I didn't pay attention to directions on the jar, and I got two types of pills mixed up."
- "I don't think one sulfa pill hurts as much as the other preservatives put into meat. Why are we even allowed to ship such young calves when there is hardly any meat on them?"
- "Farming is hell!"
- "This was a medication I had never used on bull calves and I simply didn't realize there would

be residue. Now I know."

- "Allowing a calf to get scours or pneumonia is very costly to a farmer. So, I imagine all farmers are using some source of preventative measures with their replacements."
- "The drug previously used had a seven-day withdrawal and I didn't realize the Neo-Sul junior has 30-day withdrawal."
- "We were busy harvesting corn. About three or four members of the family fed calves during this busy time. I was not aware the calf was even treated."

These answers were given to the question, "What do you believe to be the cause of most drug residues?":

- "People simply forget."
- "I don't believe that all farmers really believe that one or two little pills will possibly cause a residue problem big enough to be dangerous."
- "Routine treatment of any calves with antibiotics is the main cause."
- "You have no choice. Either let your calves die or treat them."
- "The government standard on drug residues is too high."
- "I think more farmers are raising more calves in crowded places. When they do that, they run into more disease problems, so they use more drugs."

The following responses were given as possible remedies to the situation:

- "County seminars, like pesticide seminars, would help."
- "More information should be made available."
- "I think we should continue what's being done. Most farmers don't think enough about it until they have a problem. I know I will be much more careful and never send another one to market until I'm sure it's safe."
- "More research and education should be mandatory."
- "Try to develop drugs with shorter withdrawal periods so you don't have to hang on to the calves so long afterwards."
- "Restrictions (on medications) should be as large as brand names."
- "An improved remedy with a three or four-day withdrawal time will solve a great part of the problem."
- "Writing on the containers should be larger."
- "Give us a decent milk price so we can cut down on the number of cattle on the farm."
- "Some milk replacers don't have the proper nourishment. And more information should be available on diseases that effect calves at this age."

In conclusion, there are many reasons that calves go to slaughter with drug residues still in their system. Not identifying treated animals, not reading the medication label, and not understanding the marketing system have all been implicated.

One of the best ways to avoid drug residues is to avoid the need to treat the calves by raising healthy animals. Adequate colostrum is extremely important — two quarts within two hours after birth. This gives the calf protection against many common diseases. Clean, dry housing with good ventilation is also important, and helps to prevent many respiratory diseases. These measures are much more effective than routinely giving calves a "pill."

For more information on producing healthy calves, contact your county extension agent.

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