Quality Assurance

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common sense could see the fluff in this ad. But I would also guess that most readers would wonder how much of the information really is true, given the fact that many surveys document consumer concerns about drug residues in meat.

Case 2: A few months ago, during a farm visit to solve an MMA problem, I asked a swine producer what medication he was using in his lactation feed. He answered, "I'm not sure." And so I asked whether he knew if there was any medication in the feed. He wasn't certain of that either. A trip to the premix room showed that there was no medication in the sow feed. However, we did notice several bags of Tylan + Sulfa. Did he realize that the sulfa in this product was sulfamethazine, and that this particular drug was responsible for most of our violative drug residues? He did not. Incidentally, he was using the medication only for grower pigs. But the grower pigs happened to be housed in the finishing barn.

Case 3: If someone asked you whether injectable procaine penicillin were approved for use in hogs, you would probably correctly answer, "Yes." Now, if you were also asked what swine diseases are legal to treat with penicillin, I'll bet you're like most producers and don't know for sure. In fact, erysipelas is the only disease for which penicillin can legally be given to hogs.

All three of these cases underscore our need for a Pork Quality Assurance Program. In short, we need it to maintain consumer confidence, and we need it to ensure producers understand and practice proper drug handling. Both of these benefits can result from only minimal producer effort.

How The Program Works

Levels I and II consist of a self-instruction booklet that will take less than one hour to complete. In these sections, producers become familiar with the reasons we use drugs in animal production. And more importantly, they learn what is involved in the responsible use of animal health products.

For example, all producers understand the concept of withdrawal. But some may not realize that drug carryover can occur if feeders, storage bins, auger systems, mixing equipment, and pens (manure) are not cleaned when the drug is withdrawn.

Another concept that may not be taken seriously is that of proper feed mixing. Emptying the mixer too soon after the last ingredient is added, overfilling the mixer, and operating a mixer with worn parts can all result in a poorly mixed feed which may contain pockets of high drug concentrations.

Still another component of Levels I and II is the understanding of the veterinarian/client/patient relationship. Without this commitment, there may be many seemingly routine uses of drugs that, in fact, are illegal. The case of injecting penicillin for something other than erysipelas is a perfect example.

Having completed Levels I and II, the producer is ready for Level III, the final stage in the program. This level consists of 10 "Critical Control Points" that must be understood and followed for the program to be valid. The control points begin with establishing an effective herd health plan, and end with an annual assurance checklist. To complete Level III, someone must "sign off" that you not only understand the program, but are dedicated to following it. The person who signs off need not be a veterinarian, but that would be the most logical choice since the veterinarian/client/patient relationship must be established anyway.

What Does The Program Cost?

There is no cost for the materials. But you will likely have charges from the veterinarian or consultant in your progress toward completion of Level III.

What Is The Program Worth?

Getting your drug handling procedures on sound footing makes good sense economically. It reduces the risk of a drug residue. And chances are you'll look at your operation in a new perspective that can not only save you money, but help you focus on the important tasks.

So even if there weren't a world of consumers bearing down on us with critical eyes, the merits of the program are obvious. But the fact is the very individuals who create the hog market are the same ones who wonder how we use drugs, why we use drugs, and what impact these products have on their lives.

And as we continually claw our way into a highly competitive world market, we're reminded that Pork Quality Assurance is more than a good idea, we really don't have a choice.

Al Tank, National Pork Producers vice president for foreign trade, makes a compelling point that the buyers in Japan understand the Pork Quality Assurance Program inside and out. So there is little reason for our producers not to.

Where Can You Get Information

Chances are, your veterinarian already knows about the program. If not, all materials are available from the National Pork Producers Council by calling (800) 456-7675, or (800) 456-PORK.

(Editor's note: Carolyn Ritter, Dover, said the quality assurance program is mostly common sense — following withdrawal times on drugs and not using drugs if you don't need to. "The main goal is to put the best pork on the table for the consumer," she said.)

VEAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

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A comprehensive Veal Quality Assurance Educational Program was initiated by the American Veal Association in 1988. This industry-funded, industry-directed program is comparable to QA programs in other species and production systems.

More than 80 percent of U.S. special-fed veal producers and others in the industry have participated in QA seminars since 1988.

Few medications are labeled specifically for special-fed veal; most drugs are used in an extra-label manner, which requires a prescription from an attending veterinarian.

Recently the Center for Veterinary Medicine of the Food and Drug Administration issued a policy that states that veal calves will be assigned the same target tissue, tolerance, and marker residue assigned to ruminating calves and/or cattle. The impact of this policy is that sponsors who wish to add a veal calf label to a drug approved for ruminating animals will need only go through an abbreviated procedure similar to that currently used for approval for minor use/minor species labeling of a drug.

The QA program developed by the American Veal Association has already demonstrated its value in reduction of residues in special-fed veal to less than one-third of one percent of samples tested by the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service.

More information on the veal QA program is available from American Veal Association, One Naperville Plaza, 1804 Naper Boulevard, Suite 241, Naperville IL 60563, (708) 505-8521.