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Feed A Total Mixed Ration

Saber starts his heifers on a total mixed ration at six months old. The animals are fed a 19 percent protein ration made up of around 85 percent forages. The forages are a mixture of corn silage, barleyage, and baled grass hay from Saber's farm.

Don't Have Too Many Different Sources For Calves

Saber cautions against having many different suppliers bringing calves into a heifer facility. "If one farmer is bringing in sick calves, then the entire herd is subceptible to getting sick," said Saber.

Saber encourages custom heifer raisers to screen customers.

Maintain A Good Vaccination Program

All animals coming into Saber's operation are vaccinated with a four-once vaccine. Then they are given a booster after 14 days. The heifers are also given an annual nine-way vaccine.

"We only get the vet to do pregnancy checks and give brucellosis shots," said Saber. "All of the other responsibilities are handled by my employee Joe Cooley and me."

Don't Depend On Calving Ease Bulls

Saber breeds his heifers at 15 months so that they are large enough to handle delivering a large calf.

"I don't believe in calving ease bulls," said Saber. "We make sure our calves are big enough to handle full-size calves."

In Saber's lease agreement, he is responsible for replacing a cow if she has calving problems or an immediate problem after arriving at the farm. The dairy farmer is responsible for replacing the animal if she gets mastitis or another illness one or two years into the contract.

Saber is both an active and founding member of the Professional Dairy Heifer Growers Association. The International group brings people from around the world into annual meetings to discuss heifer raising. Professional veterinarians also give presentations about proper nutrition, housing, and vaccination programs for heifers.

Saber traveled to St. Louis, Missouri, to the National conference in the end of March. Around 300 people attended the conference to get the latest information on proper heifer raising practices. Saber is also part of the committee planning the Northeast conference in November.

Drug Residue Avoidance

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What is a drug residue?

If antibiotics or drugs are found in animal carcasses at slaughter, they are called drug residues. Meat from these animals is considered to be adulterated or contaminated. It is illegal to sell a medicated animal if you think that it has drugs in its body.

Why can't small amounts of antibiotics and drugs be in the meat?

There are two main reasons that antibiotics and drugs are not permitted in meat intended for human food. 1) People who are allergic to certain drugs can become seriously ill–some even die–from eating meat containing these residues. 2) Eating meat contaminated with low levels of antibiotics causes bacteria to become resistant to the antibiotic. This means that the antibiotic will no longer kill the bacteria. There are only a limited number of antibiotics available. If bacteria become resistant to antibiotics, we will no longer be able to cure bacterial diseases.

In addition to these reasons, there are economic reasons to keep drug residues out of American meats. Other countries want to eliminate American competition for overseas markets. They claim that too much of our meat contains drugs This reduces the number of markets for American meat, results in oversupply and lowers meat prices.

How does a drug residue occur?

Most residues occur because the directions on the label have been ignored. The amount of drug to be given, the route by which it is to be given, and directions on how often to give the drug are in the instructions on the label. A withholding or withdrawal time is always specified. This indicates the number of days it should take for the drug to be eliminated from the animal's body.

If you give too much, or too often, or don't wait long enough, drugs pay be present in the meat. If an animal is very sick, the published withholding time may be inadequate. Sick animals often do not eliminate drugs normally. Even when withholding time is observed, the animal may have detectable drugs at slaughter. It is best to use some kind of screening test for drugs prior to marketing a medicated animal.

What happens when a drug residue is discovered?

When the USDA discovers a violation, the person who offered the animal for sale is identified and notified by certified letter. The state Department of Agriculture is also notified. For most first offenders the Bureau of Animal Health investigates the drug residue. The veterinarian in the regional office of the Animal and Poultry Health Inspector call the owner and arrange for an investigation. They try to discover what caused the residue. Their findings are reported to the FDA. The next 5 animals that are sent to slaughter from that farm are tested for drug residues. If a second offense occurs within a year, or if the amount of drug discovered is very large, the FDA investigates these violations themselves. FDA investigations can result in seizure of animals, injunctions against selling animals, or prosecution with subsequent fines and imprisonment.

How can drug residues be avoided?

Most violative residues occur because of failure to follow label directions and poor record keeping. Animals need to be securely identified so that confusion does not occur. Read and follow label instructions on any drug you use. Observe slaughter withholding times and consider testing the animals for drugs yourself before you send them to market.