

## UNDERSTANDING THE VETERINARY FEED DIRECTIVE

People and animals often use antibiotics to prevent sickness. We also methodically use some antibiotics for treatment and post-treatment when sickness does catch us. Because of the growing concern of drug residues, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has taken steps toward changing how antibiotics can be legally used in feed or water for food-producing animals. The agency has moved to eliminate the use of any drugs to promote growth or to improve feed efficiency. The relatively new Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) brings the remaining use of therapeutic antibiotic uses in feed and water under the close supervision of licensed veterinarians. Veterinarians, feed suppliers, nutritionists, and livestock, poultry and dairy producers will have a closer association than they've ever had in the past.

The FDA is convinced that the VFD requirement will lead to improved antibiotic stewardship and minimize any potential negative consequences of using antibiotics when producing food. Some producers, however, are distressed by increasing regulations to them. That is especially troublesome when they are already being careful with the judicious use of expensive antibiotics. Producers can expect more pressure on the use of antibiotics in animal agriculture. There will be intense scrutiny when the new VFD becomes a legal requirement by December 2016.

New legislation states that all medically important antimicrobial drugs may now be used only with appropriate veterinarian supervision. The VFD is a written, nonverbal statement issued by a licensed veterinarian in the course of the vet's professional practice that authorizes the use of a VFD drug in or on animal feed or in their drinking water. This written statement, a legal document, authorizes the producer client to obtain and use the listed VFD drug only in accordance with the specific directions for use approved or indexed by the FDA. VFD-medicated feed requires that a veterinarian, under a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR), examine and diagnose animal conditions and determine that the use of a VFD-medicated feed is necessary. It is a given that the veterinarian must be licensed and in compliance with appropriate state and federal regulations.

An Extension Fact Sheet explains that a valid VCPR exists when the following conditions are met. First, the veterinarian assumes responsibility for making medical judgements regarding health and the need for medical treatment and the client has agreed to carefully follow the veterinary instructions. Next, the veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the animals to make a general or preliminary diagnosis. Finally, the veterinarian is available for follow-up in the case of animals having adverse reactions or failing to respond to therapy. In addition, the veterinarian must be familiar with the operation and make periodic visits to the operation.

The veterinarian issues a VFD by filling out a preprinted, multipart form (preapproved by the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine) supplied by the drugs sponsor. These forms will be available for downloading at the drug sponsor's websites. The producer then presents this form to the feed supplier, who will manufacture and distribute the feed in accordance with the VFD. Medicated feed cannot be delivered without a signed VFD form. A veterinarian can write a VFD that may only apply for a maximum of six months. The veterinarian, producers and company supplying the feed must all retain copies of the signed VFD form a minimum of two years. Lots and lots of paperwork!

There are still a lot of questions about how the transition to the VFD process will unfold in the coming months. As I become more familiar with the new regulations, I wonder how our veterinarians can possibly keep up with all that's required. Already our vets are overworked, serving their clients night and day. Feed suppliers and producers are also quite busy. I'm not sure what a small grower will do if they want to purchase medicated feed. It appears that bagged feed may not have any additives included.

Consumers must know that livestock, poultry and dairy producers are committed to producing quality products that are wholesome and safe. We also eat what we produce and we are confident that the food we eat is the safest, most abundant and nutritious ever in the history of the world. We will work closely with licensed veterinarians and trained nutritionists to meet the expectations that have been established by the FDA.

Clark Israelsen  
Utah State University Extension Agriculture Agent  
Cache County