

Northwest Veterinary Associates Newsletter

September 2010

Take Nothing For Granted

I was wrapping up a herd health visit when the farm manager handed me a slip from the lab at the slaughterhouse. We had discussed the matter during herd check and he had thought that the problem had been with the Polyflex that the cow had been treated with. "Flunixin" was the drug written on the slip. It had been found in the liver and muscle tissue of the offending animal. "This is Banamine, not Polyflex," I told him. "When had she last been treated with that?"

He looked puzzled. "I'm not exactly sure when that was." There was no written documentation to help us out.

"The meat withhold for Banamine is four days, provided she had been treated IV. Intramuscular injections should not be given to cattle and require a much longer time to clear the cow's body. It can take up to three months before the drug can no longer be detected, and much longer before the muscle tissue blemish is gone."

Although Banamine is not an antibiotic, it is a drug that has been approved for use in dairy cattle, and as such, carries a withhold time that needs to be adhered to. Tests are available to find it in the milk and meat. Another residue violation on the farm within the next eight month period could mean loss of a cull cow market that would really affect the farm's economic bottom-line.

I have created this fictitious situation to bring up a few points. Most importantly, we need to remember that being able to use medicines, especially antibiotics, in our dairy cows, as freely as we do, is a real privilege. Strict attention must be paid to all labeled information to be sure that the drug used is approved for use in dairy cattle, is being used on the appropriate aged animal(s), being given for the correct condition(s), and used within the given dose range. Written records need to be kept on all treated animals, with all the information mentioned along with treatment dates, so that milk and meat withhold times can be calculated, using the labeled instructions. Treated animals in the milking herd need to be visibly identified to assure that her milk is not accidentally put in the bulk tank. Lastly, all treatment records should be reviewed on any animal prior to

her going to the slaughterhouse.

To reenforce my statement about medicine use being a privilege, I'd like to tell a true story. Our German intern, Katharina, whom many of you have had the pleasure of meeting, was amazed one afternoon with the way I dispensed some medications to one of my herd health client. I had handed the dairyman's niece several bottles of Excenel and Excede, to be used in treating metritis cases that were sick. Dr. Maslack had gone over physical exam with some of the farm hands, so I was comfortable doing this at this particular farm. Katha told me that in Germany, antibiotics can only be left at the farm after an exam has been performed by a vet on each animal in need of the drugs. The veterinarian can only give out the exact amount of medicine that he or she feels is necessary to treat the animals involved. Accurate records must be kept, both on the farm and at the vet clinics. Evidently the government sends out "bean counters" periodically to be sure that all parties are in compliance and that the medications are being used appropriately. This was quite an eye opener and it made me realize how our present system should be respected and not taken for granted.

The privilege we have in the way we are able to use medications in our dairy cattle today comes with much responsibility. We need to institute good management practices in all procedures on the farm so that we can prevent, rather than treat the majority of problems that may occur. When sick animals do come along, we need to examine them to be sure that we only treat those animals that truly need to be treated. Lastly, we must strive for excellence in identifying and documenting treated animals, so that residue violations are avoided and consumer confidence in dairy products is maintained.