Cattle Management Issues That Need To Be Addressed

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There are several hot topic that cattle producers should stay abreast of as the year progresses. The Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) is currently receiving a lot of attention as it will affect how cattle producers manage their animals, how veterinarians interact with cattle owners, and the products available for use on the ranch.

What is the VFD?

The VFD is a federal regulation from the Food and Drug Administration that controls the use of animal drugs. When the VFD was originally created in 1996 two class of drugs were identified over-the counter (OTC) and prescriptions. However no actual prescriptions were required for medicated feeds as that was determined not practical for production purposes so all medicated feeds were deemed as OTC. With the new amendments that went into effect in January 2017 a new category was created VFD drugs with the result of new and increased regulations for animal medicated feeds. The underlying intent of the new VFD rules is to regulate the use of antibiotics in the animal feed industry to preserve the efficacy of the drugs, use the drugs only for therapeutic use, and require the supervision of a veterinarian.

What does the VFD do?

The new amendments make three significant changes to the original VFD rule.

1. Require drug manufactures to alter labels for certain drug products to remove the statement regarding production issues, ie. "increased rate of weight gain", and only state uses for therapeutic health issues.
2. Changing the designation of some additives from OTC to "medically important" which categorizes them as VFD drugs which increases the regulatory requirements of the additives.
3. Use of VFD additives in feed requires the involvement of a veterinarian to fill out a VFD form before any VFD drug or feed containing a VFD drug can be provided to producer.

Why was the VFD developed?

The main issue that the VFD address is the concern regarding the potential for antibiotic resistance that could be related to increased chronic exposure to the use of antibiotics in feeds. The feeling is that antibiotics should be reserved for the "prevention", "treatment", or "control" of diseases. This new mandate removes the ability to use medicated feeds for production purposes to improve animal performance. The terms "prevention", "treatment", or "control" of diseases have specific meanings and guidelines that veterinarians will have to ascertain in each situation to warrant the use of VFD drugs. Prevention means that a disease risk must be present and the use prevent infection prior to animals becoming sick/infected. Treatment means that animals are exhibiting signs of disease that can be treated by a VFD additive. Control is invoked when a percentage of the animals are already sick, exhibiting signs of disease and the use of a VFD can decrease the spread of the disease.

Who will the VFD affect?
The VFD as implemented will affect the entire beef cattle production chain and associated industries. The cow-calf, stocker cattle, and feedlot producers will be affected if/when the want to purchase a medicated feed or supplement with a VFD additive included. Feed manufactures and feed retailer will be affected with increased oversight and regulatory paperwork that will be required. Additionally, feed distributors will be required to verify that an animal owner possess a valid VFD form from a licensed veterinarian prior to the sale of a feed or supplement.

How will this affect the cattle owner?
The first regulation an animal owner must meet is to have a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship. This means that the veterinarian must have worked with the client to ascertain the animal's health status and make clinical judgements about the animal's health status and provide follow-up care. The second regulation is that the veterinarian will have to complete a VFD form that indicates the specific drug that will be administered. There is a list of things that the VFD form must contain that includes (but not limited to): contact information for the veterinarian and client, the premise, expiration date of the VFD, the name of the drug, indications for use, directions for use, and the kind and number of animals. All of this information is indented to make sure that the feed additive is used in an appropriate, safe, and judicious manner, and prevent off-label use of the product. VFDs are species, product specific, and purpose specific (not for production) to prevent off-label use. Once the producer obtains a valid VFD form from the veterinarian it can be taken to a feed/supplement supplier to obtain the feed product for use. Use of the feed product must be in accordance to the directions associated with issuance of the VFD. The last regulation is that copies of all VFD forms must be retained for two years by the producer, veterinarian, and feed supplier.

What products Do and Don't Fall Under the VFD?
Essentially all feed-use antibiotics that the FDA, WHO, and CDC consider medically important to humans are the current target for regulation under the VFD. There is currently one VFD antibiotic approved for use in cattle, tilmicosin (Pulmotil) that is used to control bovine respiratory disease (BRD). Medically important antibiotics that are being used in the cattle industry that will require additional or re-labeling to be compliant with the VFD regulations include:

- Chlortetracycline (Aureomycin, CLTC, Pennchlor)
- Chlortetracycline + Sulfamethazine (Aureo S 700)
- Neomycin + Oxytetracycline (Neo-Terramycin, Neo-Oxy)
- Oxytetracycline (Terramycin, Pennox)
- Tylosin (Tylan)
- Virginiamycin (V-Max)

The VFD's intent is to regulate antibiotics that are important to human medicine, however a number of feed additives are routinely included in animal feeds or supplements. These feed additives that do not pose a threat to human medicine effectiveness will not require a VFD to continue use in animal production. These additives like ionophores and parasite-, insect-control include:

- Amproluim (Corid)
- Bacitracin (Albac, BMD)
- Bambermycin (Gainpro)
- Decoquinate (Deccox)
- Fenbendazole (Safe-Guard)

- Laidlomycin (Cattlyst)
- Lasalocid (Bovatec)
- Melengestrol Acetate (MGA)
- Methoprene (Altosid)
- Monensin (Rumensin)
- Morantel (Rumatel)
- Poloxslene (Bloat Guard)
- Ractopamine (Optaflexx, Actogain)
- Tetraclovinphos (Rabon)

The new regulations for re-labeling and classification of additives will take effect January 2017. The transition to this new environment for regulation is an attempt to maintain the efficacy of antibiotics important for human medicine. It is incumbent upon the beef cattle industry to demonstrate that we can be good stewards of the feed additives that are at our disposal. With increasing pressure from regulatory agencies and the public to eliminate our use of antibiotics in animal production we must protect those that we can use. Adherence to VFD regulations will not make us any more money in the short-term nor will it make our cattle any healthier. What the VFD may do is provide the mechanism for the beef cattle industry to continue to use antibiotics into the future to ensure that we can continue to produce a safe and wholesome protein source for a growing global population.

Information adapted from the following articles:

Griffin, D. "Starting points to help apply new VFD rules". *Progressive Cattlemen* pp 41-43. January, 2016.

Griffin, D. "Learn now which products require a VFD" *Progressive Cattlemen* pp 9-11. April 2016.

Lashment, T. D. "Know the rules created for the Veterinary Feed Directive". *Progressive Cattlemen* pp 8-9. February 2016.