

VFD at Work

Veterinarian shares his experiences with antibiotic use in beef production.

Story & photo by
KINDRA GORDON, field editor

With the veterinary feed directive (VFD) marking just over one year since going into effect, feedlot veterinarian Dave Sjeklocha with Cattle Empire LLC at Santanta, Kan. — the sixth-largest cattle-feeding company in the United States — says he believes the new law is serving its intended purpose of imposing more judicious use of antibiotics throughout the livestock industry. The VFD law requires a written order (paper or electronic) by a licensed veterinarian for medically important antibiotics to be used in feed or water for food-animal species.

Sjeklocha acknowledges that today, with VFD in place, many veterinarians have learned a lot about how their clients were previously feeding antimicrobial feed additives.

“Often, it wasn’t right,” he says.

Now, with VFD in place, everyone must be more cognizant of proper use, and Sjeklocha says he believes the law will be effective in reducing the use of antibiotics in food animals.

“It becomes more of a hassle for

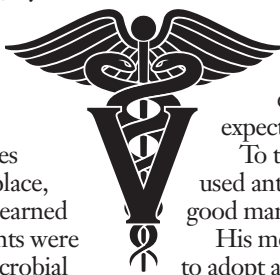
producers [to get a VFD], so they likely won’t use it unless they have a really big problem,” he explains. If a trend of decreased antibiotic use isn’t seen after a few years of VFD being in place, “we will probably see more regulations.”

Thus, to maintain livestock industry access to antibiotics, Sjeklocha says to all producers, “We are going to have to accept more judicious use and use according to the label. ... Addressing antimicrobial resistance is an issue we all need to work on.”

Looking ahead, Sjeklocha says, “I’m very concerned how long we [the industry] will be able to use metaphylaxis (the timely mass medication of a group of animals to eliminate or minimize an expected outbreak of disease).”

To that he adds, “I think we’ve used antibiotics as a substitute for good management ... as a crutch.”

His message to producers is to adopt a mind-set of finding management steps to help avoid or use less antibiotics. That starts with building a relationship with a veterinarian and dehorning, castrating, vaccinating calves on the farm or ranch. He admits that stress from commingling and transporting calves will never be eliminated, but



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preconditioning, low-stress handling, good nutrition, and treatment regimens and moratoriums can all be effective steps to decrease antibiotic use, decrease expense and increase treatment success. Sjeklocha also anticipates a day when genetics for disease resistance will be a selection tool available to cattlemen.

Regarding management, Sjeklocha suggests producers using dart guns to administer antibiotics must especially be judicious. He notes there are pros and cons to the method, but adds, “Darts shouldn’t be for everyday use.” The feedlot he works with does not use darts and has moved to needless, air-driven vaccinations and treatments.

Sjeklocha notes that scrutiny by consumers and the government aren’t likely to go away. He points to a San Francisco ordinance set to go into effect in spring 2018 requiring large grocery stores to report antibiotics used in the production of the meat they sell. Many believe the move is a means to force antibiotic-free meat and poultry offerings on store shelves, and Sjeklocha says, “will take perfectly good food out of these grocery stores.”

Will that ordinance become the norm for grocery and restaurant purveyors? “I hope not,” Sjeklocha concludes.

Editor’s Note: Veterinarian Dave Sjeklocha shared his remarks during a Cattlemen’s College session on Jan. 31 at the 2018 Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show in Phoenix, Ariz.

Cattle health & well-being

Government cooperation in the implementation of a national animal disease traceability system is something Nebraska native Greg Ibach wants to facilitate during his tenure as Undersecretary of Agriculture for Marketing and Regulatory Programs. Ibach stated as much during comments he made at the 2018 Cattle Industry Convention hosted Jan. 31-Feb. 2 in Phoenix, Ariz.

“We’ve talked about (animal disease traceability) for nearly two decades,” said Ibach, when speaking to members of the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) Cattle Health & Well-Being Committee. “It’s become even more important to move forward, for disease control, for improved international marketing and to interface with the Secure Food Supply Program.”

Ibach said he will work to “identify lanes of cooperation” to bring about a traceability system that is serviceable and a system in which cattle producers will want to participate. He also said USDA will step up in the wake of recent recurrence of bovine tuberculosis, and promised full engagement

in pushing back cattle fever ticks. Ibach assured cattlemen that farm bill legislation will provide for enhanced scientific tools to use against livestock pests and disease.

Also present for the committee meeting was Jim Roth, Iowa State University veterinarian and director of the Center for Food Security and Public Health, in Ames, Iowa. Roth said experience with outbreaks of porcine epidemic diarrhea (PED) virus in swine and avian flu in poultry, as well as the nature of an extensive and highly mobile cattle industry requires a revised plan of response, in the event of a U.S. outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD).

Roth said the plan must include an adequate supply of FMD vaccine. He called the 2.5 million doses currently stored at Plum Island Animal Disease Center not nearly enough, particularly since that is the “North American” supply for Canada and Mexico, as well as the United States. Roth encouraged NCBA advocacy for expanding the FMD vaccine bank.

Additionally, Roth spoke in favor of a national animal disease traceability system, calling

traceability most useful when dealing with major disease threats. He said that if FMD did make its way to the United States, beef exports would halt until the United States regained FMD-free status. For that to happen, other countries would insist that U.S. beef be completely traceable.

Members of the Cattle Health & Well-Being Committee also put forth a new policy directive related to the worldwide shortage in raw ingredients for manufacture of feedgrade vitamins A and E, and subsequent rise in prices of vitamin-fortified feed and mineral supplements for cattle. The directive calls for NCBA to work with industry and university experts to assess key inputs to cattle production and dependency on foreign suppliers, and then identify vulnerabilities that should be addressed.

— by **Troy Smith**, field editor

Editor’s Note: Troy Smith is a freelance writer and cattleman from Sargent, Neb. This article was written as part of Angus Media’s coverage of the 2018 Cattle Industry Convention and is copyrighted. See additional coverage distributed through Angus Media channels.