

Use of Pharmaceuticals in Food-producing Animals

What is a food animal?

Cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry and rabbits are all considered food animals by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Even if the owner of an animal considers a food animal as a pet, legally it is a food animal and potential food product. Food safety has to be assured with any drug use in food animals, so pharmaceutical use laws for food animals are very strict. Before giving any pharmaceutical product to a food animal, it is best to consult a veterinarian. Misuse of animal pharmaceutical products may break state and/or federal laws and may threaten their future availability.

Types of drugs:

- Prescription: Veterinary prescription drugs are labeled for use only by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian. Most states (including Louisiana) require that veterinary prescription drugs be used or prescribed only within the context of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR).
- Over-the-Counter: Products available for purchase by laypersons that do not require a prescription.

Veterinarian/Client/Patient Relationship

A VCPR exists when all of the following conditions have been met:

- The veterinarian has assumed the responsibility for making clinical judgments regarding the health of the animal(s) and the need for medical treatment, and the client has agreed to follow the veterinarian's instructions.
- The veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the animal(s) to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of the medical condition of the animal(s). This means that the veterinarian has recently seen and is personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the animal(s) by virtue of an examination of the animal(s) or by medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal(s) are kept.
- The veterinarian is readily available for follow-up evaluation, or has arranged for emergency coverage, in the event of adverse reactions or failure of the treatment regimen.

Types of drug use:

- Label use: The drug is used exactly according to the label, including animal species, age, class (beef vs. dairy, for example), dose, frequency of administration, duration of administration and route of administration. Label withdrawal time for meat, milk, eggs, etc. must be followed. Over-the-counter drugs can be used by animal owners as long as they are used according to the label. Prescription drugs require a veterinarian to write a prescription. This requires a veterinary-client patient relationship (VCPR-see above).
- Extra-label use: Extra-label drug use [ELDU] occurs when the drug's actual or intended use is in a manner not in accordance with the approved labeling. For instance, ELDU occurs when administration is:
 - For a species not listed on the label.
 - For an indication, disease or other condition, not on the label.
 - Is at a dosage level or frequency not on the label.
 - By a route of administration not on the label.

Conditions for ELDU:

- Under no circumstances can a non-veterinarian order the extra-label use of a drug in animals.
- Veterinarians are permitted to order the extra-label use of drugs but only under very strict rules.
 - ELDU must take place within the confines of a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship.
 - ELDU is not an option where the drug use is to enhance production. The health or life of the animal must be threatened for ELDU.
- ELDU in animal feed is not permitted under any circumstances, not even by veterinarians.
- There is a list of drugs that are prohibited from use in food animals, even by veterinarians and even in cases where the health or life of the animal is threatened.

Livestock Producer Do's and Don'ts of Prudent Drug Use

- Have a solid herd health program to decrease the need for drugs.
- Only use drugs, vaccines, feed medications, etc. according to the label.
- Make sure animals have identification.
- Keep records of which medications are used on which animals, administration date(s), dose, injection site(s) and outcomes of treatment.
- Follow meat and milk withdrawal times.
- Avoid inappropriate drug use.
 - Using antimicrobials or other drugs when not indicated.
 - Using the wrong drug.

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