

THE AMERICAN VEAL INDUSTRY: The Use of Animal Health Care Products in Veal Calves

would most likely arise. Once identified, the areas must be inspected on a routine basis with oversight from the FSIS inspectors.

The Consumer's Role

Food Safety responsibility does not lie entirely with the producer and the processor. All the food safety efforts taken by the producer and processor can be negated through improper food handling by the consumer. Steps the consumer can take to protect their families from food borne illness include:

- * Immediate refrigeration. Fresh veal is kept cold during distribution to retail stores and at the retail level. Consumers should refrigerate veal at 40 degrees as soon as possible after purchase.
- * Cook within a reasonable amount of time after purchase. Use veal chops and roasts within 3 to 5 days and ground veal and stew meat within 1 to 2 days.
- * Defrost properly. Veal frozen to 0 degrees will last several months. It is important to properly defrost the veal to prevent bacteria growth on the meat. There are three safe ways to defrost veal: in the refrigerator, estimating four to seven hours per-pound for complete thawing; in cold water with the veal still in water tight packaging and with fresh water every thirty minutes; and in the microwave according to the microwave thawing instructions. Never thaw veal by leaving it out on the counter. Cook thawed veal immediately.
- * Cook thoroughly. There are several cooking methods for veal but whatever method is used, veal should be cooked to at least 160 degrees.

Conclusion

Veal producers use animal health care products prudently to assure healthy animals and safe and wholesome food for consumers. Extensive research by reputable scientific bodies has found no correlation with the use of AHCPs in food animals and human health threats.

Conscientious farm practices and a diligent governmental inspection program provide additional safeguards that have given the veal industry an enviable safety record.

Current practices in the veal industry assure safe and wholesome food for consumers. The industry remains diligent and open to recommendations that will further assure food safety and protect human health.

Sources

American Veal Association

A Commitment to Quality

Safety Through Science

Facts About the Care and Feeding of Calves

Producing a Special Product

American Veterinary Medical Association

Position on Antimicrobials in Livestock Feeds

Animal Health Institute

Animal Health Product Use in Farm Animals

Interagency Task Force on Antimicrobial Resistance (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Food and Drug Administration, and National Institutes of Health)

Public Health Action Plan to Combat Antimicrobial Resistance

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

Myths & Facts About Beef Production: Hormones and Animal Health Products

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service

Residue Monitoring Program, Yearly Data Summary

The Veal Quality Assurance Certification Program

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Human-Use Animal Health Products in Livestock Production

U.S. General Accounting Office

Antimicrobial Resistance: Data to Assess Public Health Threat From Resistant Bacteria Are Limited

The Agricultural Use of Animal Health Products and Its Implications for Human Health

Background

Veal farming represents a \$700 million industry in the United States. With approximately 1,100 family veal farmers, primarily clustered in traditional dairy states, the industry raises surplus dairy calves for approximately 18-20 weeks, until they reach a weight of 450-500 pounds.

The intense individual attention required in veal production has resulted in mostly family veal operations. The concept of "factory-farming" is simply unpractical within the industry, as the typical farm averages only 250 calves. Special-fed calves are raised in an environment that allows each animal to receive individual, specialized care on a daily basis. The industry has been successful in producing a top-quality product through diligent use of sound animal husbandry and science-based production practices - thus allowing a steady, safe and wholesome veal supply for U.S. consumers as well as their own families.

As in all animal production, veal producers judiciously use animal health care products to keep their animals healthy, and produce a food product that is safe for human consumption. They do not use these products arbitrarily, continuously or in large doses, and they administer animal health care products under

the supervision of a licensed veterinarian.

"Individual care" is the hallmark of veal production. Individual stalls allow producers and their veterinarians to monitor each calf for health deficiencies and signs of disease and properly treat an individual calf with a specific, government-approved animal health care product (AHCP).

Health products for use in veal calves undergo stringent testing by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before they are allowed on the market. The FDA also regulates product labeling, dosage and withdrawal periods.

There are two manners in which animal health products may be used in veal production:

1. When a veal calf is young, it does not have a well-developed immune system and is at risk of contracting disease. During the first 28 days, appropriate levels of animal health care products are added to the calf's feed to combat potential pathogens. The use of these products is approved by the FDA and prescribed by veterinarians to prevent out-

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breaks of disease within the herd. The ratio of animal health care products in feed averages less than two ounces per ton of feed. FDA has approved all AHCPs added to feed. For each animal health product, the FDA defines its purpose, specific usage for the animal species and the permitted dosage level.

2. As with humans, animal health care products are administered to sick animals on an individual basis. Again, only FDA approved products are used and veterinarians prescribe them.

The judicious use of AHCPs is important to veal producers and consumers. For the producer, it prevents the loss of calves and the spread of disease from animal to animal within the herd. According to the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, calf mortality rate on veal farms is among the lowest in animal agriculture.

For the consumer, the proper use of animal health care products in veal production means a safe and wholesome food supply free of animal pathogens. A bonus for both producer and consumer is that healthy animals are ready for market sooner, thus lessening environmental impacts.

While some groups have expressed concern that use of AHCPs might lead to the development of antibacterial resistant pathogens in animals and the transfer of those pathogens to humans, study after study by reputable scientific bodies has failed to link the use of AHCPs to human health risks. At least a dozen such studies have been conducted since 1960.

Based on these extensive studies, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) maintains that current science does not warrant eliminating the use of AHCPs, and that the producer and consumer benefits from such use far outweigh the risks. The American Veterinary Medical Association concurs with USDA and states, "...there is no imminent

human health risk that mandates drastic and precipitous regulatory or legislative responses to address antimicrobial use for food animals. Inordinate regulatory reactions may unduly exacerbate the existing animal drug availability problem and lead to unknown consequence that may affect animal health and welfare, and ultimately could negatively affect human health."

Industry Practices

In addition to the science showing no human health risk from the use of AHCPs, veal industry practices assure that consumers are not exposed to violative levels of animal health product residues in veal.

In 1990, the American Veal Association (AVA) initiated the Veal Quality Assurance Program, a voluntary, self-regulated program that commits veal producers and their suppliers to follow high safety standards and conscientious animal husbandry. In 1995, the industry strengthened the program by adding a rigid certification process monitored by designated veterinarians. Nearly 80 percent of the country's veal producers have implemented the program, and the industry's participation level is among the highest in all of animal agriculture.

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The FSIS Residue Monitoring Program has verified the Quality Assurance Program's success. Under the Residue Monitoring Program, a representative sample of veal carcasses is tested for animal health product residues. Veal was tested in 1994, 1996 and 1998. In all three tests the percentage of special-fed veal having violative residue levels was less than one-one-thousandth of a percent - the lowest incident rate within animal agriculture. Both FSIS and FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine have praised the veal industry for this exemplary program.

The Veal Quality Assurance Program is designed to cover the entire production process. It starts with suppliers who must sign an agreement to follow a number of strict guidelines including:

- Specific stipulations on the purchasing and receiving of ingredients.
- The labeling and accurate use of formulas.
- The mixing, bagging and shipping of products.
- The usage of correct labels and tags.

At the farm level, producers pledge to adopt a series of quality assurance practices including:

- Maintenance of a valid veterinarian/client/patient relationship.
- Maintenance of complete calf health and treatment records.
- Maintenance of AHCP receiving/inventory list.
- Use of properly stored nonexpired medications and properly cleaned, sanitized equipment/supplies to administer these products.
- Confirmation (with veterinarians) on the use and withdrawal times for all AHCPs used and abiding by these withdrawal times.
- Providing sufficient nutritional supplements (e.g. iron, electrolytes) to maintain acceptable calf health.

- Identification and culling of calves that do not qualify as sources of quality, wholesome veal or that potentially may accumulate violative carcass residues.
- Utilization of high-quality supplies manufactured and distributed by reliable suppliers.
- Regularly checking the physical facilities of the operation: ventilation/heating systems, waste removal/storage, cleanliness, and stall repairs.
- Frequently reviewing calf feeding, treating, handling, moving and transportation methods.

The Government's Role

The final stage of veal production is in the processing plant. It is here that the government plays an important role. FSIS is responsible for meat inspection in veal processing plants. It implements two test methods within the processing plant. The first, called "monitoring", inspects tissue samples taken from a statistically based random sample of calves coming through the plant. The second testing method, called "surveillance", involves actual visual inspection of the carcasses to detect any food safety problems. If either of these methods show residue violations, the entire carcass is discarded, and its meat never enters the food supply.

Recently, the government required meat-processing plants to adopt a program called Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP). HACCP requires plant management to identify areas in the production process where food safety problems

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