



The Veterinary Feed Directive – Communicating for Success

Once the Veterinary Feed Directive is put into effect, veterinarians and producers must maintain a two-way track in communication.

by *Kate Hagans*

Livestock producers, veterinarians, retailers and agriculturists alike are working to adjust to the new Veterinarian Feed Directive (VFD) regulation, a change in policy limiting the administration of certain antimicrobials in feed.

Kansas Department of Agriculture's (KDA) animal health

commissioner, Bill Brown, spoke to Kansas beef producers about this sensitive topic at the 103rd annual Cattlemen's Day in Manhattan, Kan.

"The train has left the station — in other words this is going to happen," Brown says regarding the VFD regulation ordered to be effective on Jan. 1, 2017, and the KDA will be there for support.

The Veterinary/Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR) definition may differ from state to state.

Veterinarians will only be allowed to issue a VFD for use of specific feed grade antibiotics to producers who have developed a stable relationship with their vet. In defining a relationship, it must be built on trust and the veterinarian must have a full understanding of the client's operation.

Brown outlined his discussion by stressing that producers must realize how this change will affect them but also giving them the advice that they should begin talking with their local veterinarian.

"Now that the dust is settling, it is becoming more clear as we move forward," Brown says.

He explained the reason for this strict regulation of medically important drugs is the counterpart role it plays in human health.

"There are arguments on both sides, animal and human," Brown says. "What this VFD does is put in responsibilities for animal health and addresses those public health concerns."

Once this policy is in place, medically important antibiotics used in animal feed will be used only for the purposes of disease treatment, disease control or disease prevention with a veterinarian's permission.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved VFD antimicrobials for use in animal feed to be allowed only under a veterinarian's supervision and a written feed directive must be issued to the owner of the livestock and feed mills.

The regulation covers antimicrobial drugs administered via feed or water but not injection.

"What won't change is anything that has to do with controlling parasites, reproduction and bloat doesn't apply," Brown says.

The VFD received from a veterinarian must be in documentation. Verbal consent is not allowed. Electronic VFD documents are acceptable such as faxes, scanned copies including

ones on smart phones and electronic signatures.

Moving into the future, Brown predicts documenting VFDs electronically will become popular.

The associated cost of a VFD is certainly a concern among many producers. Brown couldn't provide a set cost but ensured that the state of Kansas is currently working to secure an affordable plan.

Veterinarians affected

"This is a learning curve for everyone," Brown says. "In the next year or two it's going to be a lot of outreach and education not just for producers but veterinarians as well."

Within the regulation of VFD drugs, they are not for off-label use. It's important to know the approved combinations.

Knowledge of the VCPR is vital to maintain. Kansas' Board of Veterinary Examiners oversees the veterinarian practice act in which the VCPR is defined.

The veterinarian will also be in charge of distribution, making sure the producer receives the VFD as well as the feed mill. Brown also says part of the regulation requires veterinarians and producers to keep personal records of the VFDs for a two-year history.

Veterinarians, feed distributors and producers will also undergo FDA audits. Brown states the FDA is currently working to establish a baseline. "All of this refers back to the documentation materials vets and producers are required to have," he says.

Ultimately, veterinarians will hold a large sum of responsibilities in issuing VFDs for their clients' operation. The definition of veterinary oversight lies within the states.

Brown stated a significant oversight is the vast number of retiring large-animal veterinarians. He ensured producers many young veterinarians are being encouraged to practice in rural locations.

Producers affected

With time, producers and veterinarians will adapt to changes.

Brown answers how this will directly affect producers and their operations.

"We're reaching the point now, USDA is starting to become more in an enforcement-mode for compliance," Brown says.

Producers will not be left behind in this act of precaution being taken for human wellness.

"This is a response of trying to meet the matters in the U.S. about public health concerns of VFD," Brown says.

CattleFax study

CattleFax recently released a survey asking producers two questions; "Do you regularly use antibiotics in your herd?" and "Do you have a vet client-patient relationship?"

Once the surveys were collected, 20% of producers could not say they had a stable relationship with their local veterinarian.

In asking producers if the use of antibiotics was a part of their program, 24% included use in mineral, feed and water and 27% included the use of injections. The other 49% stated they used the drugs "very rarely."

Brown's important link to producers is seeking a reliable veterinarian now and getting acquainted before the directive is put into action.

Jan. 1, 2017, is the operating deadline toward which producers should be working to prepare not only themselves but also their veterinarians.

Concerns were voiced about the transportation of cattle across state lines and its relationship to VFDs.

Brown admitted there are many grey areas his department is still sorting out. However, another important point lies with selecting the right veterinarian carefully and developing a strong relationship despite having different contact with vets outside state lines in the U.S.

Brown also stated it has not been defined how frequently the producer's veterinarian must visit the operation.

"The Board of Examiners wants to figure out where those grey areas

are so they can then modify them," Brown says.

Brown makes a point to state what is unacceptable in using the new directive.

"Extra label use for feed grade antibiotics is illegal for both veterinarians and producers," Brown says. It is simply defined as not in accordance with approved labeling.

"If you are going above or below dosage of what the label says you are using extra-labeling," Brown says as an example.

It is also important for producers to understand a combination of VFD drugs and over-the-counter drugs. If it includes a VFD drug, it will require a VFD.

"Producers can be aware of this by reading the drug's label," Brown says.

The regulation covers antimicrobial drugs administered via feed or water but not injection.

The expiration date of the VFD defines the term during which the VFD is valid. The duration defines the length of time the drug must be administered and completed before the expiration date.

Many particular circumstances lie in the cracks of the new regulation's platform.

"The Division of Animal Health in the Department of Ag is taking the outreach of education approach," Brown says.

Brown has high hopes the FDA will do the same in getting everyone acquainted during this time of change. He stresses the importance of education.

"Antibiotic use, stewardship, reasonable use — those are going to be the theme for the next several months," Brown says.

Producers honing in on these practices will put an emphasis on prevention of disease and stimulate acceptance of the VFD's purpose.

"It's a complex picture but it's going to take different components to make a final product," Brown says. **HW**