



Practical tips for handling antibiotics

Advice from a busy practicing veterinarian

The phone rings often in the Coaldale Veterinary Clinic in southern Alberta. It's an active bovine practice with a strong feedlot clientele. Dr. Carl Dueck, one of five vets practicing in the clinic, knows that the best results come from good systems combined with practical advice that clients actually use.

As part of that business, Dueck works with clients to prepare them for their Verified Beef Production (VBP) audits, and part of that is ensuring

effective antimicrobial management efforts are in place. Coming off a hectic fall season, here are his practical tips for handling antibiotics effectively.

Understand the therapeutic power of management. Antibiotics should not be the go to solution for disease management. The concept of a disease triangle includes the host, the pathogen and the environment, all playing a role in the onset of disease. "A classic example would be scours in calving season," he says. "If you calve in a

wet, confined area you will likely have a lot more disease pressure than if you vaccinate the dams, spread animals out, bed them down properly and keep them dry." Go to your veterinarian or use seminars and web resources for more information on good management practices.

Don't overdose. More is not better and some products can become toxic at too high a dosage.

Don't under-dose. Less may not work. Some products are expensive but label rates are there for a reason. Under-dosing will likely not solve the problem and increase chances of developing resistant bacteria.

Aggressive, early treatment. "In our feedlot practice we like to use a fairly potent, long acting antibiotic the first round because we believe it cuts down the chances of having to retreat," he says. "If you start with a lower-cost, less potent one you may not get effective kill of the bacteria and you will have to treat again. And if they don't respond after three treatments, stop treating, put them in a warm, comfortable place and let them recover as they will. Continued treatment is just extra expense and can lead to antibiotic resistance."

Check product expiry dates and storage protocols. Make sure products haven't expired. Some, like oxytetracycline, can become more toxic past their due date. And make sure they are

stored according to label instructions — in a fridge, at room temperature or away from light.

Use good delivery equipment. No point in spending good money on a product and delivering it with unclean or improper administration equipment.

Send a message to your buyers. Especially for feedlots, make sure buyers know you want cattle delivered quickly, not standing in a shipping station somewhere waiting to make a truckload. There may be a tendency to believe any extra disease pressure can be addressed with an antibiotic when those animals arrive, but that is simply not true.

Reduce fill time in the feedlot. If you can fill a pen in less than a week you will usually have fewer disease problems than if you spread it out over two or three weeks.

Think alliances. More feeders are looking at building industry alliances to get farm-direct calves, preconditioned and feedlot ready. "That is something we see growing, although it is still hard for large feedlots to use this approach to fill pens effectively."

Work with your vet. "Most of our clients are on a herd health plan that incorporates best management practices for the use of antibiotics, and good records that ensure animals going to market are free of medications."



Veterinary advice for using animal health products is important in the VBP program.

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