



Using animal health products wisely

Using animal health products properly can reduce cost on a cattle operation, says producer Betty Green. “When we reconciled our health and financial records the savings just jumped out at us.”

Green is part of a family cow-calf and feedlot operation at Fisher Branch in Manitoba’s Interlake. She says by being conscientious about using the correct product at the proper time, one can significantly cut animal health costs.

“Many producers carry on their business assuming they are doing things properly,” she says. “Most are, but even the best producers find that the recordkeeping within the Verified Beef Production program helps them become better.”



Records show herd history to help you or your vet decide what is working, or when to rotate products to avoid resistance.

The fundamentals of proper animal health product use are straightforward, she says.

The right dose. Getting the right dose increases the chances of addressing the issue that’s being targeted, says Green. “You want the right amount of product but not more than you need. That’s costly and won’t do any good at all.”

It’s important to have an accurate estimate of animal weight, then use the product according to label directions. “If the product calls for two doses 48 hours apart and the animal is looking a little better, you still have to give them the second dose,” she says. “We want these products to continue to work for us and for that to happen producers need to use them properly.”

The right product. As producers get busy they will sometimes use what’s in the medicine cupboard. Check with a veterinarian to determine what’s best for the particular job.

Proper application. Producers need to administer products correctly according to label directions. A product given intramuscularly (in the muscle), or subcutaneously (under the skin) will be absorbed at different rates into the animal’s system. And a difference in withdrawal times needs attention or there could be a potential residue.

It’s important to restrain animals appropriately to avoid excessive movement when injecting, and choose a neck injection whenever possible. Consider a neck extender on your chute.

Does the syringe deliver properly?

“Here’s a simple way to test calibration,” says Green. “Fill the syringe with water. If it’s a 10 cc syringe, set the dose at two cc and squirt five times. The syringe should be empty. Then refill the syringe with water and set the dose at five cc. Squirt twice and the syringe should be empty.”

Proper storage. Always store the product according to label direction. Too much heat, sunlight or cold could make a product less effective or useless.

Why write things down?

It takes work to keep good records and it’s fair to ask if it’s worth it.

“Ultimately, we’re working with food so it’s important to know exactly what happens,” says Green. “We want to accurately predict when the chemicals were used by the animal and that the product has been absorbed properly.”

“Writing it down indicates when the product was administered and when the withdrawal period is over. Medications delivered in feed or water can easily be overlooked when rushing to ship cattle. So remember to check the right record.”

It’s all about improvement

Beef producers are proud people and they want to do the right thing for their animals and their industry, says Green. Administering drugs properly shows they are producing a safe food product.

“That’s the same whether you have 10 animals or several thousand,” she says.