



Quality Care Matters

A Column about Dairy Animal Care provided by the Pennsylvania Beef Council and the Center for Dairy Excellence.



How Important Is Record Keeping?

Some dairymen might question why they need to document antibiotic use and other medical treatments on their farm. Some will say it's not that important and they just don't have the time or resources it takes to keep good records.

But with food safety issues at the forefront of consumer concerns, it's more important than ever for dairymen to keep accurate records on their farms, according to Dr. Ernest Hovingh, Penn State field investigator and dairy extension veterinarian.

"I think dairymen need to document all antibiotic usage on the farm," Hovingh said. "It's very important, especially when it involves food safety and product quality."

Dairymen need to be responsible and accountable for what they should be keeping records of on the dairy, of things that matter. "Some producers keep very good records and some keep almost no records," he said. "Dairy record systems make it easier to keep records today and we must stress the importance of good record keeping. Dairymen often don't realize the importance of doing so until there's been evidence of a residue violation in milk or meat."

Hovingh believes that the answer could be dairymen influencing other dairymen. "I can stand up at a meeting and stress the importance of good record-keeping," he explained, "but I think we really need producers who have always kept good records, or who have had a problem and are now keeping better records, to educate their peers."

Penn State Director of Field Investigations and Extension Veterinarian Dr. Dave Wolfgang said in the current consumer climate it is important for food producers to ensure consumers that the food they buy is produced in a safe and wholesome manner.

"Good records are one of the best ways to document successes or failure of treatment protocols," he said. "Properly used, records can help producers make better and more cost effective decisions."

According to Wolfgang, in a vast majority of cases, records are not used nor evaluated so they are seen as a waste of time and effort. Records are also important for farmers to confidently share with officials if a food safety issue comes into question. "Keeping records is not a total insurance policy, but without records, there is no protection," Wolfgang said.

Hovingh suggested the following list as the top best dairy practices for record keeping on the farm.

1. Keep it simple.

- Designate specific persons on the farm to administer all antibiotics and provide appropriate training, and training on record-keeping.

- Use up-to-date protocols to reference common treatment regimes, including withdrawal times.

- All protocols, especially extra-label treatments, should be developed in consultation with a veterinarian in a valid VCPR, and include milk and meat withdrawal times.

- Only rarely use 'non-protocol treatments' and make sure they are recorded along with the withdrawal time.

- Only permit designated person(s) to make decision about going 'out of protocol.'

- Record the name of the person administering the protocol, as well as the date and identity of the individual animals receiving the treatments.

2. Don't assume anything.

("I don't need to write down this shot — there's no chance this heifer will be going to slaughter." "I don't have



Rebecca Long Chaney

time to write it down, but I won't forget I treated Elsie!")

3. Use a simple, efficient, effective record-keeping system — paper or electronic.

- Should be easy to record, at the time of treatment, what was done by who, to who, when.

- Should be easy to find out who was treated with what, by who, six months ago.

4. Be redundant — besides the written or electronic treatment record, use at least one other method of recording/marketing treated animals (crayon or leg band on animal, note on 'whiteboard', etc.)

5. Keep it meaningful

- Keep records of ALL antibiotic treatments, including dry cow therapy, and anything else that has a withdrawal time, such as vaccines.

- Don't feel the need to keep records of everything, such as oxytocin injections.

- Make sure everyone involved understands why good records are important.

6. Have a system in place for verifying that EVERY animal that leaves the farm has had its record checked to make sure adequate withdrawal times have been observed.

- Assign someone the responsibility for making sure 6.0 is carried out before any cow gets on a truck, and record the fact that this was done.

- Have a system in place to test an animal for residues prior to shipment if in doubt, and record all test results.

Wolfgang agreed that following best dairy record keeping practices will make a difference.

"Usually these need to be based on useful outcome measures," he said. "Timely review of records can be a win-win-win. Animal health can be improved, product quality and consumer confidence can be increased, and producers can better use their time and resources to get the biggest bang for their bucks."

Producers can find more information and specific record keeping tools through their DHIA program, AI provider, and local and state Extension specialists. Help is available to design a record keeping system for individual operations that will assure dairymen are following the best animal care practices that result in good dairy herd management.

For more information visit one of these web sites: www.pa-bqa.org and www.centerfordairyexcellence.org and www.bqa.org.

Editor's Note: "This is the eighth in a series of articles focusing on the dairy and beef quality assurance programs available throughout the United States. These articles will provide information for dairy and beef producers to better manage the quality care of their animals."

Rebecca Long Chaney wrote this as a special to the Pennsylvania Beef Council and Center for Dairy Excellence.