Drug Administration in Dairy Cows:

Post Treatment Marking

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FDA

Overview

When antibiotics or other medications that have a meat or milk withdrawal time, are administered to dairy cows, it is necessary to identify them so that milkers and farm workers can easily recognize treated cows. It is extremely important that milk from treated cows is not allowed to enter into the bulk tank and that a cow is not inadvertently shipped to slaughter while the meat may contain a violative drug residue. Milk that enters the bulk tank is the milk that is eventually hauled away in a tanker truck to a creamery for subsequent production of milk or dairy products for human consumption. Addition of milk that contains an antibiotic or other drug into the bulk tank can result in a violative drug residue in bulk tank milk. Milk that contains drug residues can also be mixed with milk from other dairies at the creamery and thereby contaminate that milk as well. In both of these situations a dairy farmer that ships milk containing violative drug residues will have to pay heavy fines associated with proper disposal of contaminated milk. Because of this, it is extremely important that dairy workers are able to identify and distinguish treated cows from the rest of the milking herd.

Common methods to mark cows that have been treated with drugs include livestock chalk, leg straps, and neck collars. All of these methods are designed to catch the attention of farm workers and milkers cows to indicate whose milk or meat cannot enter the food chain. This cow is being dry-treated with an intramammary antibiotic infusion for which there is a meat withdrawal as well as milk withholding time following calving. Even though this cow is not going to be milked for the next 60 days, it is being marked with chalk so that if the cow inadvertently ends up in the milk parlor, the milkers would know that its milk cannot be allowed into the bulk tank. Because chalk can eventually wear off or become soiled and not visible, this farm manager also is applying a red Velcro leg band to identify that this cow was treated with antibiotics. Identification markers such as these also alert farm workers who are responsible for gathering and shipping cows for slaughter purposes. These treated animals cannot be shipped until appropriate slaughter withdrawal times have been observed. The cow shown here has received drugs for which a meat and or milk withdrawal is required and to indicate this, both rear legs have been wrapped with red Velcro straps. In addition to the red Velcro straps, red livestock chalk was also used to mark the left hip with a red "X" to indicate that the cow was treated.

Another method for marking cows as having been treated is the use of red neck collars. In this video a farm manager is placing red coverings over the numbers on the neck collar to indicate that this cow was just dry-treated. Use of such a collar also helps farm workers know that this cow has received drugs and helps prevent this cow's milk from inadvertently being added to the bulk tank in the unlikely event that the cow ends up in the milk parlor during her dry period. The use of multiple methods to mark treated cows is not practiced on all dairies, however, it does help to reduce chances of milk or meat that is from treated cows from entering the food chain. Proper identification of treated animals is an important first step to assuring that milk and meat entering our food supply is free of from potentially harmful substances.