

Take Time— Read the Label

Take time to read the label. That's what the eye-clock symbol on the labels of animal health products and medicated feeds reminds you to do.

It's a good habit to develop. Everything you need to know about dosages, methods of administration, and withdrawal times is printed right on the label.

It's no accident that this much information is contained on the label. Animal health product manufacturers, feed manufacturers, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency spends thousands of man-hours annually making sure that labels carry just what the user needs to know.

Those few square inches of space represent many dollars to you. Following the label instructions carefully could mean the difference between profits from productive, high market-value livestock, and losses due to health problems and illegal residues.

Let's see just what you can find out from labels of most animal health products and medicated feeds:

Five standard categories. Labels on animal health products generally have five categories of information important to livestock producers: contents, directions, indications, limitations and warnings.

Contents. Like most food-related products, animal drugs, pesticides and medicated feeds have ingredients listed on the label. The first ingredient listed represents the greatest proportion of the product, and other ingredients are listed in descending order. Sometimes the percentage of each ingredient is given.

Directions. If you've used a favorite animal health product for years, it is tempting to just skip over the directions when you begin using a new supply. Manufacturers of these products have just one word of advice: **DON'T!**

Approved use levels, frequency of administration, withdrawal periods, etc. can change. The only way you can be absolutely sure you are using the product properly is to read the label each time you administer the medication.

Dosage instructions are clearly spelled out. When to administer the product is also noted. This is especially important if it relates to feeding schedules, the onset of symptoms, or other time factors.

Finally, the label tells how to prepare the product. This may include, for example, directions to shake or warm the product, or dilute it with water or feed. Storage conditions are also specified on the label.

Indications. The label also indicates what the product will treat or prevent. For example, one might read, "An aid in the prevention of outbreaks of cecal coccidiosis in chickens."

While these indications are helpful, you should not rely on them as substitutes for the diagnostic skills of a veterinarian. Dif-

ferent diseases may exhibit similar symptoms, so if you are in doubt, check with an animal health specialist.

You can be sure the drug is safe and effective for the indications specified on the label. The product has been extensively tested by the manufacturer and rigorously reviewed by the government to determine this.

Limitations. If the product has any limitations, the label will spell out this information. For instance, animal drugs carry expiration dates and these will be noted on the label. Other limitations will be listed, as well. For example, a particular product may be good for treating mastitis in lactating dairy cows, but another product may be better for use in dry cows.

Warnings. This category provides some of the most critical information on animal health products, but too often it is overlooked by otherwise careful people. Neglecting to observe warnings about withdrawal periods, for example, might allow the animals to go to market with illegal levels of drug residues in their systems. That could cause the producer to lose income, or possibly face fines or prosecution.

In addition, warning and caution statements can provide important reminders which may help you avoid more serious health problems. For example, preparations containing cortisone and similar substances for external use may say: "Caution—Do not use where infection (pus) is present, since the drug may allow infection to spread."

Many animal health products and medicated feeds highlight label warnings with bold arrows. The use of these arrows was developed by the American Feed Manufacturers Assn., the trade group representing feed mixers and millers, and the Animal Health Institute, representing manufacturers of animal pharmaceuticals and feed additives.



Take time—observe label directions.

The people who are responsible for labeling—drug, pesticide and feed manufacturers, and government regulators—work with an overriding concern in mind: that producers heed label instructions and use these products properly.

Members of the Animal Health Institute, who incorporate the distinctive eye-clock symbol in their product labels, have extensively studied drug label readership. They have concluded that those farmers who do read product labels find them easy to understand and follow.

But . . . no matter how clear a label is, it will not communicate anything if it is not read. That is what members of the Animal Health Institute are saying with the eye-clock: take the time to read the label. You'll find it worthwhile.

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