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*Clover Connection*

By: Kate Pittack,  
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### **The Veterinary Feed Directive will affect Youth Livestock Exhibitors**

Many people, or at least those involved in animal agriculture have certainly heard about the veterinary feed directive. Our office has provided information to our youth who are involved in livestock projects, but I found this article recently that I believe is another good piece in explaining what the directive means. Extension Agents from Colorado and one of my former Nebraska Extension colleagues share some of their views. You can find this piece in its entirety at: <http://www.thefencepost.com/news/the-ups-downs-of-the-vfd/>

When the Veterinary Feed Directive was created by the Food and Drug Administration, it was intended to regulate larger producers and feedyards, said Larry Hooker, Weld County Extension 4-H livestock agent. He doesn't think the FDA intended the same levels of regulation on backyard farmers or 4-H participants. But the directive, a set of rules monitoring feed-grade antibiotic use in livestock, will affect all livestock producers, big and small, when it goes into effect Jan. 1, 2017.

Many 4-H participants raise their animals – swine and poultry, especially – by taking a pre-emptive approach. Instead of waiting until they get sick, they treat with feed-grade antibiotics. Baby chicks and piglets are very susceptible to several diseases and illnesses when they are young, like respiratory illnesses. Once a chick is infected, it can be difficult to catch the sickness and treat it in time to save the animal and keep disease from spreading, especially for children who are still learning about animal stewardship.

“It puts a lot of responsibility back on the 4-Hers to be able to see those things, especially when you get some brand new families that are just starting in those things,” Hooker said. “They may not be aware of respiratory issues and things that happen so quickly.” Even for the families who know what to look for, there's another time crunch under the Veterinary Feed Directive.

Instead of having medicated feed available over-the-counter at feed stores, people will only be able to purchase it if a veterinarian issues a prescription-like order. That means when illness breaks out, you need to contact your vet. The veterinarian may need to visit the property before even writing the order.

An obstacle Travis Taylor, the Lincoln County Extension director for Ag and 4-H, sees is the availability of medicated feed in small quantities when 4-H kids need it. Since it's going to be more regulated, he doubts local feed stores will carry small numbers of bags specifically for local showmen, since the Veterinary Feed Directive requires the veterinarian, the feed distributor and the buyer all to keep detailed records. That may lead more 4-Hers to switch to injectable antibiotics to treat sicknesses after they appear, Taylor said.

The downside Taylor sees is that while medicated feeds help protect from infection, the injectables help once infection is present. So when a multitude of animals are gathering at shows, and some aren't medicated against disease, there is some risk of commingling and transmission.

But that brings another opportunity for 4-H education, Taylor said. It's a chance to talk to young agriculturalists about biosecurity, about the importance of not sharing water troughs and feed pens, about minimizing nose-to-nose contact. "The risk is at the same level, we're just going to have to pay closer attention to animals when they come back (from shows)," he said.

For Rob Eirich, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension educator and director of the Beef Quality Assurance program for the state of Nebraska, the key to the Veterinary Feed Directive is education. He said one of his focuses right now is getting the word out to the operations that only use a feed-grade antibiotic once or twice a year, because they likely won't realize the impact the regulation will have on them until they need a prescription and aren't ready to get one.

"I fully believe one of those areas is 4-H, the show animal industry," Eirich said. "I think there is going to be an impact across the board with our youth programs with how to handle risk."

So Eirich and other extension workers, like Hooker and Taylor, are working to spread as much information about the Veterinary Feed Directive as possible through newsletters, social media updates and seminars. Eirich said he's talked to some producers who are still in denial that the directive will be enacted, but he tries to emphasize to them that it's not as restrictive a regulation as it could be.

He also emphasized that antibiotic resistance is a real issue – one that livestock producers have battled, as well as medical doctors, as certain medications grow less effective. This regulation is one that can address that without putting unrealistic barriers on farmers and ranchers.

"I know people are scared because it is a regulation," he said. "I think (these rules) will give us more solid information as we continue to work with antibiotic resistance and antibiotic stewardship."

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