
Sulpha residues jeopardise bobby veal exports

Bobby calves treated with drugs must not be sent for slaughter. The residues of such treatments will invariably be detected in the meat.

MAFQual intends taking legal action against offending farmers and veterinarians under section 47 of the Meat Act 1981. This provides for a penalty of \$10,000 for individuals, plus \$500 per day for every day the offence continues. For corporate bodies the penalties are respectively \$40,000 and \$2,000.

Roger Marchant, MAFQual veterinarian, has worked closely with the bobby calf industry and with MAFQual Meat Services and has developed a quality assurance programme for bobby calves (reported in *Surveillance*, Vol 14, No 2). The industry is funding the programme, and it expects the returns from the programme will be worth the investment.

Problem

Antimicrobial drug residues have been detected in New Zealand bobby veal, both in the United States and within New Zealand. The United States, which is effectively New Zealand's only foreign market for bobby veal, imports about 90% of the 3.25 thousand tonnes produced here annually. Residues found in this meat

are jeopardising the future of the trade, and also putting the rennet trade at risk.

The residues are the result of bobby calves being treated either directly or indirectly with drugs and being sent to slaughter.

Practices which result in residues in bobby calves involve:

- Treating calf scours, caused by dirty draughty calf pens/houses and/or associated with the practice of induced calving, with antimicrobials.
- Feeding to bobby calves the milk from cows treated with drugs, eg, cows with mastitis and other post-calving problems.
- Returning treated non-responsive scouring replacement calves back into the "calf pool".

Approach

During 1986 the Meat Division of MAF monitored the situation and found that drug misuse in calves was occurring in all parts of New Zealand. In light of this, there has been a decision to increase levels of sampling significantly.

Calves may be sampled at the farm gate and/or the slaughterhouse. Where drug residues are found, all associated analytical costs will be charged to the farmer or the relevant "pool". Meat containing residues will be condemned.

It is recommended that scouring bobby calves are treated with supportive electrolyte therapy rather than antimicrobial drugs. The Animal Remedies Board takes account of this when licensing new products, and requires cautionary wording to accompany products for potential use in calves.

Reasons why antimicrobial therapy is contraindicated in neonatal calves are:*

- Antimicrobials are not effective against rotavirus, cryptosporida, and coronoavirus, which are common causes of calf scours.
- Several commonly used antibiotics will cause diarrhoea in clinically normal calves.
- Antibiotics may select for resistance in bacteria.
- Antibiotics can prolong the period of excretion of *Salmonella* bacteria and increase the prevalence of carrier animals.
- Antibiotic residues are unacceptable in meat products.
- The most important therapy in severe calf diarrhoea of any cause is electrolyte and fluid replacement.

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*As indicated by Whangarei Animal Health Laboratory communication—Tech ed.