

Tetracycline and lame cows: How it affects your bulk tank

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In addition to the Veterinary Feed Directive, there have been several other changes that affect the way producers can access over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. One product affected is tetracycline powder, commonly used in foot wraps by hoof trimmers for the treatment of digital dermatitis (hairy heel warts). Topical tetracycline use is expected to be scrutinized more closely as the National Conference on Interstate Milk Shipments (NCIMS) is going to start a pilot tetracycline testing program on tanks of milk.

Tetracycline testing includes Oxytetracycline, chlortetracycline, and tetracycline. The current plan is to test 1/15 of all grade A raw milk for tetracycline residues on a quarterly basis. Processors will use test kits approved by NCIMS. A violative residue is a residue that is above 300 parts per billion (ppb), which is the maximum residue limit for tetracycline. Testing for beta-lactams will not change from current procedures.

How will this affect your farm? The primary change you might notice is that you as a farm will be expected to supply the tetracycline powder for your hoof trimmer as he/she will not be able to purchase it. In addition, there are no antibiotics currently labeled to treat digital dermatitis so the use of topical tetracycline is considered extralabel and therefore will require a valid VCPR and prescription.

Care should be taken when using topical tetracycline for foot treatments. Research conducted by the University of Minnesota has shown that it can cause residues in milk and teat ends can become contaminated. This same research has also shown that using 2 grams or less of tetracycline powder per lesion for a maximum of 2 lesions per cow will minimize risk for causing a residue and successfully treat the lesion. Using more than 2 grams of tetracycline and treating more than 2 lesions per cow will increase the risk for a violative residue. In addition, treating more than 20% of the herd at one time for hairy heel warts will also significantly increase the risk for a violative tetracycline residue in the bulk tank. Experts from Iowa State and the University of Minnesota recommend that no more than 20% of the milking herd be treated for heel warts with tetracycline at one time. Working with your veterinarian and hoof trimmer will be key in treating lame cows appropriately while reducing residue risks.