

On the label of every prescription and over the counter drug provided by a veterinarian is a very important number reflecting the withholding time of that particular product. This small piece of information, which varies from product to product, is pertinent, and if not followed can result in serious consequences for a cattle operation. We will discuss the importance of following the withdrawal times of products, and repercussions that may result if producers fail to follow that withdrawal period.

The withdrawal time of any product is the amount of time necessary for the product concentration level in tissues to decrease to a safe, acceptable level. Each prescription product, and most over the counter products have a withdrawal time. Before using any product, the producer should take special care to note that withdrawal period, and ensure that the animal is not slaughtered, and does not have a possibility of being slaughtered for beef consumption before that withdrawal time has passed. Further, the withdrawal time only applies when the drug is used according to label instructions. This means that changing the dose, route, volume per injections site, or duration of treatment can drastically change the required withdrawal time of a product.

As cattle producers, we must continue to be aware of the reputation that we have with consumers. Not only should we produce beef that is free from lesions or other damages, we should do our best to produce meat that is safe for consumers to enjoy. We can help accomplish this by ensuring that we follow withdrawal times closely. This will reduce the presence of drugs in meat, which may cause reactions- some potentially fatal- in consumers who are allergic or sensitive to those drugs. Dr. Mike Apley, professor in Clinical Sciences from Kansas State University, states "If an animal is tested for residues and an amount is found that is above the tolerance, the carcass will be condemned and you will get to explain the occurrence to an FDA investigator. Violations may result in you being unable to sell animals until you have fixed the problem." The USDA tests for drug residue randomly, or at the request of inspectors. And, if there is evidence of prior disease in a carcass, samples will be immediately taken from that animal.

With new, faster testing available that can quickly determine which drug and at what level it was detected, producers cannot afford to misuse products, or ignore withdrawal periods. If you do not follow withdrawal times, legal action may take place which can quickly place holes below the waterline in your operation, and ruin your reputation as a cattle producer. To help prevent holes below the waterline, follow label instructions carefully, and contact a veterinarian before using a product if you have any questions.

Thanks,
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