

Earlier this month, US meat packer Tyson Foods, Inc., wrote a letter to cattle suppliers stating that as of September 6 they will no longer accept beta-agonist Zilmax fed cattle. Tyson's decision to refuse these cattle was because they found that after receiving animals at some of its beef plants, cattle fed Zilmax had difficulty walking, or were unable to move altogether. In the letter Tyson wrote, they stated "we do not know the specific cause of these problems, but some animal health experts have suggested that the use of the feed supplement Zilmax, also known as zilpaterol hydrochloride, is one possible cause." Although Tyson has not found Zilmax to be the root of the lameness issues, evaluation of the problem is ongoing to supplement the interim measure of not accepting Zilmax fed cattle after September 6. Tyson also stated in their letter that "this is not a food safety issue," but "about animal well-being and ensuring the proper treatment of the livestock we depend on."

Merck, the manufacturer of Zilmax, continues to stand behind their product, stating that "animal well-being is a priority" and their thirty year history of product development has shown that Zilmax is safe for animals. They also state "we are confident that based on all of the available data on Zilmax, we experience reported by Tyson is not attributed to Zilmax." They are confident in the safety of their product, but have a strict policy to vigorously pursue all reported events, so they are taking an interim measure of their own and have temporarily suspended the sales of Zilmax until further notice.

Zilmax is a feed supplement that is fed to cattle in the last few weeks before slaughter to help increase weight gain and lean muscle production. Arguably one of the best weight gain additives on the market, Zilmax is accredited for cattle gaining 24-33 pounds more than normal in a feeding period. This increase in meat production per calf also results in an increase in overall meat supply when Zilmax is fed. But, what does all of this mean for the future of the cattle industry?

Many experts believe that 15-30% more beef will need to be produced in order to make up the difference of Tyson not accepting Zilmax fed calves. It is also expected that the decreased supply of meat will result in higher prices. One expert stated that "Removing Zilmax from feed rations could bring down the weight of cattle, resulting in less available beef, and drive up prices." And, with Zilmax now temporarily off the market, we may see this come to pass. After all, soon after Tyson's big announcement, cattle futures rose to a five month high. At this time none of the three other major packers- Cargill, Natural Beef, and JBS USA, plan to follow Tyson's lead.

Please contact us if you have any questions regarding the affect the Zilmax ban has on the cattle industry. You may also refer to the following links for more information:

<http://www.weeklylivestock.com/stories.html#third>

<http://www.globalmeatnews.com/Industry-Markets/Zilmax-manufacturer-takes-action-over-Tyson-claims>

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/09/us-livestock-tyson-idUSBRE97805G20130809>

<http://www.bovinevetonline.com/news/industry/Will-beef-production-plummet-with-Zilmax-suspension-220269141.html>