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Animal Welfare

Cattle producers know that giving animals the proper care, handling and nutrition they deserve makes good business sense. They also recognize that it is just “the right thing to do.”

Cattle producers have a tradition—a way of life—that has always included the symbiotic relationship between human caretaker and animal. Cattle producers take pride in exemplary care and husbandry of their animals. Producers use sound animal husbandry practices, based on decades of practical experience and research, to assure the well being of cattle under their care.

Of course, humane treatment of meat animals is not limited just to the producer. The U.S. meat industry is also one of the most heavily regulated industries in the nation.

What is the difference between “Animal Welfare” and “Animal Rights”?

“Animal welfare” and “animal rights” are often confused by both the media and the public. “Animal welfare” may be defined as the use of proper animal husbandry practices by producers that will assure the continuous well being of animals under their care. Perhaps the American Veterinary Medical Association, representing the nation’s veterinary professionals, best describes the commitment required of all livestock producers to the welfare of livestock: “Animal welfare is a human responsibility that encompasses all aspects of animal well being, from proper housing and nutrition to preventative care, treatment of disease, and when necessary, humane euthanasia.” On the other hand, “animal rights” is a philosophy based on the premise that humans have no right to use (or “exploit”) animals for their own purposes. Proponents of “animal rights” reason that just because we have the power to do so does not give us the right to do so. This philosophy leads its proponents to challenge our right not only to eat animal products, but also our use of animals in biomedical or agricultural research.

What is the Producer Code for Cattle Care?

The Producer Code for Cattle Care, first developed in 1996, represents a comprehensive set of good production practices, which includes the following recommendations for producers to implement in raising and handling cattle:

- *Provide adequate food, water and care to protect the health and well being of animals.*
- *Provide disease prevention practices to protect herd health, including access to veterinary care.*
- *Provide facilities that allow safe, humane, and efficient movement and/or restraint of livestock.*
- *Use humane methods to euthanize sick or injured livestock and dispose of them properly.*
- *Provide personnel with training to properly handle, and care for, cattle.*
- *Make timely observations of livestock to ensure basic needs are being met.*
- *Provide transportation that avoids undue stress caused by overcrowding, excess time in transit or improper handling during loading and unloading.*
- *Keep updated on advancements and changes in the industry to make decisions based on sound production practices and consideration to animal well being.*
- *Do not tolerate persons who willfully mistreat animals.*

What is the Humane Meat Packing Process?

The meat packing process has evolved over the years, based on the latest scientific research, to ensure both humane treatment and food safety. The Humane Slaughter Act of 1978 dictates strict animal handling and slaughtering standards for packing plants. Those standards are monitored by federal meat inspectors nationwide, who are present in packing plants during every minute of operation. FSIS inspectors are empowered to take action in a plant any time they identify a violation of the Act's requirements, which include:

- Animals must be handled and moved through chutes and pens in ways that do not cause stress.
- Livestock must be rendered insensible to pain prior to slaughter. The Act details the methods that must be used to cause insensibility.
- Animals must have access to water, and those kept longer than 24 hours must have access to feed.
- Animals kept in pens overnight must be permitted plenty of room to lie down.
- The dragging of downers or crippled livestock in the stockyards, crowd pen or stunning chute is strictly prohibited.

Where can I go for more information?

For more information, please visit www.BeefFromPastureToPlate.org

Antibiotics

The primary day-to-day concern for all cattle producers is the health and well being of their animals. Producers and veterinarians take great care to promptly detect and treat animals with the correct type and amount of medication, providing the most efficient treatment for returning an animal to good health. Careful and judicious use of animal antibiotics is one way America's beef producers help an animal regain or maintain excellent health while producing safe, wholesome and nutritious beef.

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics, also known as antimicrobials, are medications that fight bacterial infections. Antibiotics made specifically for cattle are used to help an animal regain or maintain superior health and produce safe beef. Antibiotics can prevent infection when bacterial pathogens are suspected or known to be in an animal's environment, or when an animal encounters high-stress situations that increase susceptibility to illness.

What is the approval process for antibiotics?

Antibiotics used in beef cattle production must go through a rigorous testing process before being approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to assure the safety of cattle as well as beef products entering the food supply. FDA has developed an approval process which stringently manages antibiotic use and specifically monitors for potential resistance. This system helps protect human health while giving veterinarians and beef producers the tools needed to keep animals healthy. Guidance 152 is an FDA recommended process introduced in 2002 that subjects all antibiotics to a thorough and stringent resistance risk assessment that identifies any potential risk of using a particular antibiotic.

Why are antibiotics used in cattle?

Producers and veterinarians take great care to administer only the amount of antibiotics needed to bring an animal back to health in order to maintain the continued effectiveness of medicines. The Beef Quality Assurance program has been training beef producers about the safe and appropriate use of antibiotics since the 1980s. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association Producer Guidelines for "Judicious Use of Antimicrobials" have been in place since 1987 and specifically outline the appropriate use of these products:

- Avoid using antibiotics that are important in human medicine.
- Use a narrow spectrum of antimicrobials whenever possible.
- Treat the fewest number of animals possible.
- Antibiotic use should be limited to prevent or control disease and should not be used if the primary intent is to improve performance.

What about antibiotic residue?

Beef producers and veterinarians take great care to use the optimal amount of antibiotics needed to return an animal to good health, and the government supports this effort through regular testing.

- The United States government mandates that no beef with antibiotic residues that exceed FDA standards be allowed in the food supply; therefore, all beef sold in the United States is safe from antibiotics.
- The Food Safety Inspection Service's National Residue Program (FSIS NRP) (www.fsis.usda.gov/) is a multi-component, analytical testing program for residues in domestic and imported meat, poultry and egg products.
- The FSIS NRP has been in effect since 1967 and provides a variety of sampling plans to prevent concerning levels of residues from entering the food supply. The program also provides national data on the occurrence of chemical residues to support risk assessment, enforcement and educational activities.

Where can I go for more information?

For more information on antibiotics in the cattle industry, please visit www.BeeffromPastureToPlate.org

Growth Promotants

The safe use of growth promotants in beef production is assured by the product approval procedures required by FDA, as well as by the on-going testing policies and procedures administered by the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS), a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). FSIS regularly tests for residues in meat to assure there is no misuse of growth promoting products.

Do those hormones ever end up in the beef?

There is very little difference in the amounts of estrogen found in beef from cattle raised with or without growth promotants (1.9 versus 1.3 nanograms per serving). FDA regularly tests for, and has never found, residues in meat that would indicate misuse of growth promoting products. To put this into perspective, consider that the human body naturally produces hormones in quantities much greater than could ever be consumed by eating any food. The average man or woman produces 35,000 times more hormones on a daily basis than could be present in beef or other food.

	Estrogen (in nanograms*)
Non-Pregnant Woman	480,000
Pregnant Woman	3,415,000
Man	136,000
Male Child (pre-puberty)	41,500
Female Child (pre-puberty)	54,000
Treated Beef Animal	1.9 nanograms per 3-ounce serving
Non-Treated Beef Animal	1.3 nanograms per 3-ounce serving

*(*A nanogram is one billionth of a gram, which might be visualized as one blade of grass in an entire football field.)*

What are growth promotants and how are they administered?

Growth promotants are typically small pellets implanted under the skin on the back of an animal's ear. The pellets release tiny amounts of growth promoting hormones, which safely dissolve as treatment is completed. Growth promotants are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Why are growth promotants used in beef production?

For more than 50 years, growth promotants have helped cattle producers safely meet the increasing consumer demand for lean beef. Typically, cattle raised with growth promotants can have up to 18 percent more lean muscle than other cattle, with an equal decrease in fat.

Is the use of growth promotants safe?

Yes. The use of hormones in cattle production has been declared safe by scientific organizations world wide including the Food and Agriculture Organization/World Health Organization, the European Commission Agriculture Division and the Codex Committee on Veterinary Residues. In addition, Growth promotants are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) after a thorough review of data from rigorous scientific tests, similar to the tests FDA requires for human drug approval.

What about the affects on my health and the environment?

Growth promotants have been used safely in agriculture for more than 50 years. Beef producers feed their animals the best science-based diet available and use humane animal husbandry practices. Growth promotants allow producers to deliver leaner beef and use fewer acres for grain, which is better for the environment.

Where can I go for more information?

For more information on growth-promoting hormones in the beef industry, please visit www.BeefFromPastureToPlate.org

BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy)

What is BSE and how is it spread?

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), frequently called mad cow disease, is a degenerative neurological disease affecting the central nervous system of cattle. BSE affects older cattle, typically those more than 30 months of age. The vast majority of cattle going to market in the United States are less than 24 months old.

Experts in human and animal health agree that U.S. beef is safe from BSE because of the progressive steps taken by the U.S. government. BSE is spread by cattle consuming feed containing ruminant byproducts which include central nervous system tissue. In 1997, the Food and Drug Administration banned the use of ruminant-derived protein supplements in cattle feed, which in conjunction with a series of import bans has effectively eliminated the spread of BSE in this country.

How is BSE detected?

The ongoing U.S. surveillance system is designed to target populations of cattle that are the most at risk for the disease: cattle with signs of neurological disorders, cattle that cannot walk and those over 30 months of age. This program tests over 40,000 cattle each year, a level ten times higher than recommended by the World Animal Health Organization.

Does BSE pose a risk to human health?

Human and animal health experts agree that U.S. beef is safe from BSE because of the progressive steps taken by the U.S. government for the past two decades. However, there is an association between BSE and the human variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD). Scientists believe vCJD likely developed from humans consuming products containing nervous system tissue of cattle with BSE. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits from the food supply material that would most likely carry the BSE agent (such as brain and spinal cord). This process happens every day with every animal to ensure this diminishing disease has no affect on public health.

Is U.S. beef and milk safe?

Absolutely. The U.S. food supply remains the safest in the world, including beef and dairy products. The government has implemented a series of strong measures that protect our food supply.

BSE is extremely rare in the United States because of the preventive steps taken since 1989, well before there was an opportunity for this disease to take hold. These measures begin with USDA public health veterinarians examining every single animal before processing and preventing those with signs of neurological disease or those that cannot walk from ever entering the food supply. In addition, USDA mandates that removal of specified risk materials prior to processing.

Consumers can remain confident in the safety of the U.S. beef and milk supply.

What systems are in place to prevent future cases of BSE in the U.S.?

The U.S. government, in partnership with the industry, has worked for years to build a system that works to protect animal and public health by preventing the introduction of BSE and preparing to prevent its spread.

In 1989, the U.S. began a series of bans on imports of animals or at-risk animal products from BSE countries and, in 1997, instituted the ruminant to ruminant feed ban. As mentioned above, the U.S. has in place an ongoing surveillance system targeting the highest risk populations and the mandates the practice of removing specified risk materials from all cattle. A report by the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis, released in July 2006, found that removal of these high risk tissues from animals 30 months and over “almost completely eliminated potential human exposure” to BSE. Together, all of these interventions work to protect the U.S. cattle population from BSE.

Where can I go for more information?

The risk of BSE to humans in the U.S. is virtually zero. To learn more about BSE, visit the following Web sites:

- Beef Industry Scientific Panel Information Resource: www.BSEinfo.org
- Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub_bse.htm
- Food and Drug Administration Q&A: www.fda.gov/cber/bse/bseqa.htm
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service: www.aphis.usda.gov/newsroom/hot_issues/bse.shtml

FMD (Foot-and-Mouth Disease)

What is FMD and how does it spread?

Foot and mouth disease (FMD) is a highly contagious viral disease of cloven-hoofed animals such as cattle, sheep, swine, goats, deer and other wildlife. While FMD does not affect humans or the safety of meat and milk, an outbreak of FMD can have sizable economic consequences.

What is being done to protect the United States from FMD and prevent travelers from bringing it into the U.S.?

The United States has been FMD-free since 1929 when the disease was eradicated from this country. The U.S. Department of Agriculture monitors reports of FMD outbreaks in other parts of the world. Whenever an outbreak is reported, the USDA takes action in conjunction with other government agencies to prohibit the importing of live, cloven-hoofed animals and animal products from the affected country into the United States.

In addition, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) foreign animal disease unit conducts more than 800 investigations on suspect animals annually – averaging more than two tests per day – in order to remain vigilant and prevent the potential spread of FMD in this country.

America's beef producers know the importance of remaining vigilant on their farms and ranches to prevent the potential introduction and spread of FMD on their operations. Because the livelihoods of beef producers depend on protecting the health of their herds and the safety of their product, they realize the importance of working with and following the direction of local, state and national agencies in the event of an FMD outbreak.

How do you get rid of FMD?

The FMD virus can be killed off by heat, low humidity and some disinfectants. It is only rarely fatal to animals, however very young animals are especially susceptible to the disease and can die as a result of contracting it. There is currently no cure for the FMD virus and while the disease typically lasts from two to three weeks with the majority of animals eventually recovering from its effects, some animals may take up to six months to recover and others may never recover.

If most animals don't die, why go to such great lengths to eradicate FMD?

FMD is highly contagious among cloven-hoofed animals, with nearly all animals being exposed to it eventually contracting the virus. If FMD becomes widespread in a country, it can cause significant economic consequences.

Where can I go for more information?

For the most current and comprehensive information and resources on FMD, please visit www.FMDinfo.org