

Talking Points

Collection of Milk Samples from Known Tissue Residue Violators

One of FDA's highest priorities is to ensure the safety of animal-derived foods for human consumption. FDA is responsible for ensuring that approved animal drugs to treat and prevent animal diseases are not misused in food-producing animals.

FDA works with USDA and the states to monitor meat, poultry, and milk for unapproved or unsafe drug residues. The residue program for meat and poultry involves USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) testing meat and poultry for a variety of drug residues and reporting positive findings to FDA for follow-up and potential enforcement action.

Although only 7.7% of the cattle slaughtered in the United States are adult dairy cattle, they represent 67% of the tissue residue violations reported by USDA's FSIS.

Drug residue violations in dairy cattle tissues often result from poor practices on the farm. These practices may include: failure to maintain treatment records, failure to identify treated animals, failure to follow labeled withdrawal times, increasing the labeled dosage, increasing the length of treatment, or giving the drug by an unapproved route of administration.

FDA is concerned that the same poor practices may also result in drug residues in milk, especially from non-beta lactam drugs.

FDA and the states currently participate in the National Conference on Interstate Milk Shipments (NCIMS), a voluntary coalition of regulators established to ensure the safety and wholesomeness of fresh milk in the United States. FDA publishes the Grade A Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO) as a model ordinance for states to adopt. The PMO requires bulk milk pickup tankers be tested for the presence of at least four of six specific beta-lactam drugs (penicillin, ampicillin, amoxicillin, cloxacillin, cephalosporin, and ceftiofur).

Beta-lactam antibiotics are a broad class of antibiotics that include penicillin derivatives (penams), cephalosporins (cephems), monobactams, and carbapenems. They are the most widely-used group of antibiotics. However, there are many other classes of drugs potentially used on farms that are not routinely tested for in milk.

FDA plans to issue a sampling assignment to determine if farms previously identified with drug residues in tissues have management practices that are also leading to drug residues in milk.

The sampling assignment would target only the most egregious tissue residue violators, those with the highest risk scores that have been known to ship adulterated food (meat) in interstate commerce.

The milk samples from these known violators would be tested for over 25 different drugs commonly used on dairy farms.

FDA is targeting the few members of an otherwise compliant industry in order to ensure that the public can have the utmost confidence in the dairy products they consume.

FDA continues to believe that the nation's milk supply is safe. Efforts such as this sampling assignment will ensure that potential problems, if they exist, remain minor and are quickly mitigated by education and enforcement, as appropriate.