Drug Residue Avoidance
Poultry

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The poultry industry is a dynamic and highly specialized industry. This large commercial industry is heavily influenced by the slightest of changes in economic factors such as feed, availability and cost. Each year billions of chickens are raised in both commercial and backyard settings as a source of food, for both meat and eggs.

Antibiotics are used in poultry as a means to prevent, control or treat disease.

Due to public concerns over the widespread use of antibiotics, some producers have started eliminating the use of antibiotics in order to produce and market “antibiotic free” chicken.

Drug residue refers to the presence of veterinary pharmaceutical products such as antimicrobials and deworming products in meat or milk.

These substances enter into an animal’s body by the following routes: feed, water, injections, external treatments or by accident. The residue may remain in the tissue up to several months.

Intensive poultry production have tended to increase the risk of food contamination due to the rapidly growing fast-food industry and the demand for increasing meat production. Several antibiotics have been employed for animal therapy.

The risk of violative drug residues can be minimized if treatment protocols are carefully followed and approved drugs are used for the class of animal being treated.

An “illegal drug residue” is any drug found above the allowable range in an animal sent to slaughter.

Contaminated meat and eggs can be a major concern for human health. Any adulterated product may result in drug residue allergies or other adverse effects in humans.

Producers found guilty for illegal drug residue may face the following:
- financial penalties,
- criminal penalties,
- refusal at sale barns and packing facilities, or
- negative public perception.

The backyard poultry industry is faced with the challenge that there are very few drug products on the market for egg-laying hens in non-commercial settings. Most of the FDA approved medications for laying hens are designed to meet the needs of large scale operations. A drug product used beyond what is specifically stated on the approved FDA label is ‘extra-label.’

A commonly used medication for treating chickens are “dewormers.” There are very few dewormers labeled for all classes of chickens and are often in the form of medicated feeds which increase the difficulty for use in small flocks. It becomes challenging to ensure the dose of the product is accurate and that they actually consumed the product.

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