The Veterinary Feed Directive: Are You Ready?
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Last fall, The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued its final rule on the Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD). The VFD is a new regulation, which becomes effective on December 31, 2016, and provides oversight on how a farmer uses antibiotics delivered to livestock by feed or water. The goal of this regulation is to ensure that those “medically-important” antibiotics used in human medicine, are not used for growth promotion purposes in livestock production. These classes of antibiotics can only be used when necessary, by veterinarian prescription, and only for the purposes of treating animals that are sick.

The first requirement is for the farmer to have a formal relationship with a veterinarian. This will be a signed document between the two parties and is known as a Veterinary Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR) form. It simply verifies that you and your veterinarian have agreed to work together on animal health issues, and that the veterinarian knows about your farm, the livestock you raise, and your mutual expectations regarding the care of these animals.

The second part of the VFD is to ensure a veterinarian’s prescription accompanies any antibiotics that will be added to the feed or water. These antibiotics can only be used to treat animals that are clinically ill – it cannot be delivered to an entire pen if those animals are not sick. An example would be providing medicated milk replacer only to the sick calves and not to the other calves in the pen. The antibiotic must be used according to label directions, and it cannot be used as “extra-label.”

The VFD does not impact the feeding of zinc, copper sulfate, or ionophores to livestock. Since these products are not antibiotics, their use is not restricted.

Records of the use must be kept on the farm and with the veterinarian for a period of two years.

For a list of medically important antibiotics covered by the VFD, view Table A1 from FDA’s Guidance for Industry document located at: