Furthering Families

Food safety begins on the farm

Keys to keeping livestock and their products safe

Despite the fact that the U. S. has the safest food supply in the world, food safety has become a high profile issue. Media attention related to livestock diseases, food recalls, and foodborne illness has heightened consumer awareness and concern. *E. coli, Salmonella* and *Listeria* have become household words. Consumers want to protect their families from these and other contaminants that may find their way to the dinner table.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), Michigan State University (MSU), veterinarians, commodity groups, and livestock producers are working together to develop new food safety strategies and techniques that will promote consumer confidence in Michigan food products

Livestock producers play an important role in food safety

Building consumer confidence in the safety of food products is increasingly important to everyone in the food production chain. MDA, MSU, commodity groups, and producers are coming together to help ensure food safety from farm to fork.

Recent events have caused plant operators to rethink food safety programs. As these programs change, new plant requirements may impact dairy and beef producers. Packing plants may ask producers to guarantee that their animals meet certain health standards before they are brought in for processing.

According to researchers, one high-risk source for beef is cull dairy cattle. These cows are considered higher risk because of many factors, including the improper use of antibiotics and/or improper withdrawal times. Dairy producers will be under increasing scrutiny with regard to dairy beef safety.

Producers can take steps to ensure food safety

1. Control pathogens (disease causing organisms such as bacteria and viruses) with proper disinfection techniques when necessary. Prevent contagious diseases from spreading on the farm by using preventative health care measures, such as proper vaccinations and proper biosecurity management techniques.

2. Reduce contamination from pathogens by maintaining a good animal husbandry program. Reduce drug residues by observing proper administration procedures and proper withdrawal times. Your veterinarian can be very helpful in evaluating the overall conditions and needs of your farm.
3. Ensure the animals' environment is sanitary and carefully maintained. Even though the animals are properly fed, watered, handled and transported, these extra precautions on the farm lessen the risk of disease.
4. Vaccinate for diseases such as IBR (Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis), BVD (Bovine Viral Diarrhea), pneumonia and others. Routinely test all animals for diseases such as Bovine Tuberculosis and Johne's Disease. You should consult you veterinarian about what is appropriate for your farm.
5. Track animals as they enter and leave the farm. Good record keeping and identification allows farmers and veterinarians to monitor medical treatment and other management procedures. This is essential if it becomes necessary to trace the source of a disease or drug residue.
6. Establish a client/patient relationship with your veterinarian. This allows an outside professional to verify food production practices, a step that provides protection for the producer if his/her practices come into question.
7. Implement a Quality Assurance Program (QAP). QAPs can guide farm sanitation practices, suggest ways to minimize residues, lessen repeat violations, and reduce food contamination by pathogens. For more information about QAPs, contact the Michigan Department of Agriculture.
8. Follow the Generally Accepted Animal Management Practices (GAAMPS) outlined in Michigan's *Right to Farm Act*. For more information about GAAMPS, contact MDA.

Human Health Factors and Handwashing

In the U.S. today, the threat of humans contracting diseases such as bovine TB from animals is extremely unlikely. However, people who come into contact with TB-infected animals are encouraged to take extra precautions and contact their physicians or local health department for regular TB testing. Extra precautions while handling animals include wearing disposable latex gloves and washing your hands after handling animals or any food product that may possibly be contaminated by exposure to pathogens.

Frequent hand washing is an effective strategy to prevent food borne illness, although few people do it properly.

- Wet hands with clean, warm water, apply soap, and work up lather.
- Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds (sing the "ABC song" to yourself—that takes about 20 seconds).
- Clean under the nails (using a nail brush works well) and between the fingers. Rub fingertips of each hand in suds on palm of opposite hand.
- Rinse under clean, running water.
- Dry hands with a single-use towel

Food Safety is Everyone's Responsibility

It should be emphasized that food safety is the responsibility of everyone throughout the food system—from farm to fork. In addition to the safe food handling practices of livestock producers, meat packers, food processors, retailers and food service workers, consumers have a responsibility for food safety in the home. Most improper food handling occurs in the home.

In addition, farmers and other consumers are encouraged to drink pasteurized milk; follow prudent handling of their food products including using proper refrigeration, washing hands and utensils, and using a meat thermometer to cook meat to the proper temperature. Remember, food safety is important on the farm and in the home.

For further assistance on good agricultural practices, contact your county or state Extension educators or agricultural food safety representatives.

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