A DAIRY FARM VISIT
​8/14/17

The topic of antibiotics in human health and animal health is and has been a concern for american families. It also concerns farmers/ranchers as we use those food items.

During a recent visit to my friend Anna's dairy farm, she was busy treating a cow for mastitis, which is a bacterial infection of the udder. Following treatment I noticed Anna placed a "Red Band" on the cows leg. Generally Anna's cows are very healthy but should a cow develop an infection or illness antibiotics maybe used for treatment.

My question following treatment was, " Just how do you prevent milk from the antibiotic treated cow from entering milk produced by healthy cows?" Anna proceeded to discuss and explain several pre-cautionary steps used to prevent treated cows milk ( tainted milk ) from entering their refrigerated bulk storage tank, holding milk for shipment to their milk processor.

First, Anna's family and all farm employee's ( full and part-time ) have completed a " Dairy Quality Assurance" program. DQA is a voluntary program emphasing animal health, welfare, handling, balanced rations, management of milking equipment and procedures. Also, handling and storage of vaccines and antibiotics to ensure a safe healthy milk product -- Milk, Cheese, Ice Cream, Yogurt and others -- for american families. I learned that their DQA was very much like the "Beef Quality Assurance" program that we used on our beef farm.

They follow recommendations of their herd health veterinarian for any and all treatments for their cows. They have worked close with the veterinarian to establish a valid client patient relationship. Thus, the vet is familiar with the herd health program used for milking cows, dry cows, heifers and calves raised on their farm.

They carefully read and follow label instructions for all herd health products. These labels informsAnna just how and where to administer the correct dosage to obtain the desired results from the health product. Also, just how long the product or antibiotic will remain in the cows system -- or withdrawal time, as stated on the label.

During the withdrawal time period her cows wear the "Red Band," serving as a reminder for the person in the milking parlor -- "Do Not" -- milk this cow in our bulk tank. Anna showed me a special container in which the treated cow is milked and the tainted milk is dumped -- "Not Used."

She continued to explain other safe-guards employed by their milk processing company to keep America's milk supply safe and wholesome.

The bulk milk truck driver upon arrival to pick-up Anna's milk takes an individual milk sample from the farms bulk tank before adding their milk to the tanker load. I have observed these truck drivers taking samples but did not fully grasp the reason until now. I thought the sample was for butterfat testing which affects milk pricing.

Upon arrival at the milk processing facility, another milk sample is retrieved before. Un-loading the tanker. Anna said "there is not a single tanker load of milk from dairy farms that isn't tested," addding "milk maybe one of our most tested food items."

Should the combined ( milk from several dairy farms ) tanker load of milk test positive for any antibiotic. The entire tanker load is "dumped." No tainted milk enters the processing facility. The processing facility then goes to each farms individual bulk tank sample to determine which farm had tainted milk.

Should!!! An antibiotic or foreign substance be discovered, the farm producing tainted milk maybe fined and receives no payment for milk. If that farm is a repeat offender, they maybe suspended from shipping milk for a period of time and required to go through several testing procedures before being permitted to resume milk shipments.

Each farms individual bulk tank sample is tested regardless, so that each farm can be informed as to the quality of milk being produced.

Milk at the processing facility is pasteurized, heated to 160 F for a period of time to destroy any organism that maybe contained in the milk. Thus increasing milk's shelf life and safety.

Anna, indicated that regardless of what we ( myself and american families ) have heard there are no antibiotics or harmful substances found in the milk in the supermarket display cooler. Plus, she buys milk at the supermrket just like everyone else and her families health is important too.

Antibiotic use in food animals makes judicious use of antibiotics in dairy, beef and other food animls an important part of improved health management.

Needless to say, I gained more confidence in milk quality and safety from my farm visit with Anna.

NOW GIVE ME A GLASS OF THAT COLD MILK.