Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) Fact Sheet for 4-H Youth Livestock Producers and Families

What is a VFD?

A VFD is a written (nonverbal) statement issued by a licensed veterinarian that authorizes the use of an approved VFD drug or combination VFD drug in or on an animal feed. This written statement authorizes the client (owner of the animal) to obtain and use animal feed bearing or containing a VFD drug or combination VFD drug to treat the client's animals only in accordance with the conditions for use approved by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration).

(1) The client (youth producer) must establish a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) to be able to get a VFD. This is true whether the 4-H member has one food-producing animal or several.

When must the VFD be implemented?

January 1, 2017. Starting January 1, 2017, you can no longer stop by a feed store and buy a bag of medicated feed containing certain types of antibiotics that were previously classified as over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. As of January 1, 2017, the FDA requires that clients have a VFD to be able to purchase animal feeds containing these antibiotics.

What is a VFD drug?

Antibiotic drugs required to have a VFD order to be added on or in the feed are those deemed by the FDA to be medically important for human medicine. The FDA is concerned that improper or overuse of these antibiotics may contribute to antibiotic-resistant bacteria making it harder to treat human illnesses. Examples include Aureomycin®, Lincomix®, Neo-Terramycin®, penicillin, and tylosin. For a complete list refer to the "Drugs Transitioning from OTC to VFD Status" link at the end of this document. These antibiotics are no longer allowed to be used for production uses to enhance growth or improve feed efficiency. They are still allowed for therapeutic uses under veterinary supervision to (1) treat animals diagnosed with an illness; (2) control the spread of illness in a herd; and (3) prevent illness in healthy animals when exposure is likely.

Drugs that do not require a VFD are those that are not deemed medically important to humans. Examples include Rumensin®, Bovatec®, Medacox®, monensin, amprolium, and dewormers. These types of medications can still be used over-the-counter (OTC) for production uses to enhance growth or improve feed efficiency, as well as for therapeutic uses (treatment, control and prevention).

What species of animals require a VFD?

Cattle, swine, sheep, goats, poultry, honey bees and fish, as well as other food-producing species, even if they are not intended for food production. For example, backyard chickens kept as pets still require a VFD for certain antibiotics to be legally added to their feed, and a prescription for certain antibiotics to be added to water.

What is a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR)?

Most states have a definition of what constitutes a valid VCPR written in current law, including Ohio. Ohio law and related regulations are designed to ensure that a veterinarian does not prescribe drugs or recommend treatment without actually seeing the animal or animals in question. To establish a VCPR in order to obtain a VFD, you need to first identify a veterinarian who you wish to work with if you do not already have one. To write a VFD and otherwise treat your animals, the veterinarian must personally see your animal(s), become acquainted with their care, and have done so recently enough that he/she can make medical judgements. To write a VFD, this likely means the veterinarian will have had to examine your animals in the last six months, as that is the longest period of time for which a VFD can be written.

CFAES provides research and related educational programs to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis. For more information: go.osu.edu/cfaesdiversity.

While all licensed veterinarians in Ohio can write a VFD or a prescription for water-based antibiotic drugs, all may not choose to work with food-producing animals, as they may elect to practice veterinary medicine only in their clinic or on specific species.

Why do I need a VCPR?
The veterinarian is the person most qualified to determine when an animal needs a specific medicine, how much of that medicine it needs each day, and how long it should be administered. By being involved in this process the veterinarian can ensure appropriate drug use, minimize the chance of bacterial resistance developing, and keep antibiotic residues out of our food supply.

How can I establish a VCPR?
The first step is to find a veterinarian who is willing to treat your 4-H project animals. It is up to you to initiate a VCPR, and should be done before you get your 4-H animals. You can look for veterinarians in your area at the Ohio Veterinary Medical Association website (www.ohiovma.org) under the public tab and search by city. If you already have a veterinarian, but he/she has not seen your animals in over a year, you may wish to contact him/her to ensure he/she can work with you on obtaining a VFD if and when you need one. Think of a VCPR as a relationship similar to what you would have with your family doctor.

(1) The veterinarian writing the VFD or prescribing medications must be licensed within the state where the animals are being treated.

Am I going to be able to get medicated feed?
YES. The steps and process are more involved because you can no longer just go to a feed store and buy certain medications to mix in with your feed or buy medicated feeds containing medically important antibiotics. Producers must get a VFD order from their veterinarian and then send or take the VFD order to a feed distributor to get the VFD feed. Your veterinarian may send the VFD directly to where you buy feed.

When I buy my show pigs (for example), will I still be able to get a couple bags of medicated feed from that producer?
If the medicated feed contains an approved VFD drug, you must have a VFD before getting that feed. Your veterinarian must see these pigs to be able to write a VFD. Plus, the producer must be a distributor complying with FDA's distributor requirements to be able to distribute a VFD feed to you once you provide them with a VFD order.

What about feeding water soluble medications?
Beginning January 1, 2017, all antibiotics important to humans that are administered through drinking water will require a written prescription from your veterinarian. You must have established a VCPR to be able get a prescription to buy these drugs or products. Although a VFD and a prescription are not the same, you need to have a VCPR to obtain both. The VFD rules only apply to medically important antibiotics fed on or in feed products, while a prescription applies to many products including medically important antibiotics administered through drinking water. For a list of drugs transitioning from over-the-counter to prescription status, refer to the "Drugs Transitioning from OTC to Prescription Status" link at the end of this document.

What about feeding milk replacer?
Milk replacers are considered feeds. If using medicated milk replacer containing an approved FDA drug mixed with water or mixed with feed, you must have a VFD. Medicated milk replacers will no longer be labeled for continuous feeding and therefore will not be allowed to be used continuously.

How often do I have to get a VFD?
There will be a VFD expiration date that defines the period of time for which the authorization to feed an animal feed containing a VFD drug is lawful. The expiration date specifies the last day the VFD feed can be fed to an animal or group of animals and under the regulations cannot be longer than six months.

A VFD feed or combination VFD feed must not be fed to animals after the expiration date on the VFD. You must contact your veterinarian to request a new VFD order.

What are my responsibilities as the client (youth producer) when using antibiotics important to humans in feed?

(1) Only feed animal feed bearing or containing an approved VFD drug or a combination VFD drug to animals based on a VFD issued by a licensed veterinarian.
(2) Do not feed a VFD feed or combination VFD feed to animals after the expiration date on the VFD.
(3) Provide a copy of the VFD order to the feed distributor if the issuing veterinarian gives you the distributor's copy of the VFD. The veterinarian may send the VFD order directly to your feed distributor.
(4) Keep a copy of the VFD order for a minimum of 2 years.
(5) Provide a VFD order for inspection and copying by the FDA upon request.

USE GOOD MANAGEMENT PRACTICES TO PREVENT DISEASES (and the need for a VFD)!

(1) Observe your animals daily.
(2) Make sure your animals have adequate shelter and enough space relative to their stages of production.
(3) Maintain their pens. Keep the pens clean, making sure bedding is clean and dry. Remove sharp objects. Make sure flooring and footing does not cause injury or lameness.
(4) Provide adequate feeder space, a nutritionally balanced diet relative to their stages of production, and clean, cool water made available at all times.
(5) Handle your animals properly.
(6) Proper ventilation and temperature are important for performance, growth and the health of your animals.
(7) Follow recommended biosecurity guidelines to keep diseases away!
(8) Consult a veterinarian when questions or issues arise.

Links to Additional Information

(1) FDA Summary Fact Sheet: http://www.fda.gov/animalveterinary/developmentapprovalprocess/ucm449019.htm
(2) Requirements for Producers (FDA): http://www.fda.gov/animalveterinary/developmentapprovalprocess/ucm455413.htm
(3) Requirements for Distributors (FDA): http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/DevelopmentApprovalProcess/ucm455414.htm
(4) Requirements for Veterinarians (FDA): http://www.fda.gov/animalveterinary/developmentapprovalprocess/ucm455417.htm
(5) Drugs Transitioning from OTC to VFD Status (FDA): http://www.fda.gov/downloads/AnimalVeterinary/DevelopmentApprovalProcess/UCM482258.pdf
(6) Drugs Transitioning from OTC to Prescription Status (FDA): http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/DevelopmentApprovalProcess/ucm482106.htm
(7) OSU Veterinary Extension OTC Brochure: http://www.ohiovma.org/downloads/veterinarians/Brochure_VFD.pdf

Authors: Lucinda Miller, Ph.D., Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development, Livestock, Companion & Small Animal Programs; Nancy Snook, Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development, Noble County; Travis West, Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development, Vinton County. Ohio State University Extension, Columbus, Ohio. December 5, 2016

Reviewers: Jack Advent, Executive Director, Ohio Veterinary Medical Association; Mark Armfelt, DVM, Diplomat ABVP Dairy, Dairy Technical Advisor, Elanco Dairy Business; Leah Dorman, DVM, Director, Food Integrity & Consumer Engagement, Phibro Animal Health Corporation; Tony Forshey, DVM, State Veterinarian, Ohio Department of Agriculture; Diane R. McDaniel, State Liaison, Food and Drug Administration