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Rosie Nold

David R. Smith

University of Nebraska at Lincoln, dsmith8@unl.edu

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"Banned Mammalian Protein" - What Does it Mean?

By Rosie Nold, Extension Youth Animal Science Specialist and David R. Smith, Extension Dairy/Beef Veterinarian

What should 4-H members know?

For a number of years, 4-H members exhibiting livestock have signed an "Ethics Affidavit and Statement of Disclosure." This disclosure has asked exhibitors to certify that they have not used any non-approved drugs on their animals and that if any approved drugs were used, the withdrawal time had passed. In 2001, an additional statement was added to the affidavits, stating

"If exhibiting beef or sheep, we attest, that to the best of our knowledge, the finishing ration fed to animals under our ownership does not contain "prohibited" mammalian protein (i.e. ruminant meat & bone meal)."

The statement was added in an effort to decrease consumers' fears of BSE, or bovine spongiform encephalopathy, which often is referred to in the media as "mad cow disease." The outbreak of BSE in the United Kingdom was associated with feeding of certain products, such as ruminant meat and bone meal, to livestock. Although no BSE cases have ever been found in the United States, not feeding meat and bone meal from ruminants is a way to help prevent BSE from spreading, should the disease ever occur in the United States.

In the past, ruminant meat and bone meal was a common protein source in feeds. It is a byproduct from cattle harvest and is made by rendering, or heating, meat scraps and bones that are considered not edible for humans.

Is this new?

No, this really is not new. In 1997, the Food and Drug Administration banned feeding certain "mammalian protein" to ruminant animals such as cattle, sheep and goats. Ruminant meat and bone meal is one of the feeds referred to as "banned mammalian protein." What is new in 2001 is that some companies that harvest cattle are requiring the people from whom they buy cattle to certify that ruminant

meat and bone meal has not been fed to the cattle.

How do I know if the feed contains ruminant meat and bone meal?

Since this rule has been in effect since 1997, cattle, sheep and goat feeds on the market today should not contain meat and bone meal derived from ruminants. However, to be sure, read the feed label. Many types of animal protein are still acceptable to feed to cattle sheep and goats, and are not considered "banned mammalian protein." Animal protein products that are acceptable for cattle, sheep and goat feeds include blood meal, gelatin, milk and milk products and proteins (such as meat and bone meal) from swine, poultry or horses.

Many labels for cattle, sheep and goat feeds are now more specific in listing the type of animal protein the feed contains, but unfortunately, there are still some feed tags around that list only "animal protein." A feed label may list "animal protein" because there are many different sources of protein that originate from animals. The problem with these labels is that you cannot determine if ruminant meat and bone meal is included. If in doubt, ask the feed manufacturer. There is usually an 800 number for the manufacturer on the feed labels.

Do not feed cattle, sheep, or goats any feeds manufactured for other species because these feeds may contain meat and bone meal from ruminants.

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F-1, General Livestock

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