
Read and Understand the Feed Label

All commercially available feeds have to contain a tag or label that includes information mandated by law, according to Rick Rasby, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Beef Specialist. The only exception would be a customer-formulated feed. Be an informed buyer. A feed tag contains information you need to understand in order to feed correctly.

Information that must be on the feed tag includes: net weight, brand name, guaranteed nutrient analysis, a common name of each ingredient, name and address of the manufacturer/seller, directions for use, precautionary statements for safe and effective use, if the feed includes a medication, there is additional information that needs to be included on the label, purpose of the medication, names of all active medications, concentration of all active medications, precautionary statement for withdrawal period, and warnings against misuse.

Medicated feeds are used for your animals and in the case of a sickness. They should never be used as routine replacement for good management. Medicated feeds/supplements must be fed according to label directions. If the feed is medicated, the word “MEDICATED” usually appears directly below the title or name of the feed. Your nutritionist, veterinarian or beef specialist cannot prescribe a feeding level other than what is indicated on the label.

Quality Assurance standards reinforce laws regarding keeping records when feeding medicated feeds for at least one year and recommend keeping the records for three years. The feed tag gives a very brief description of what the product is to be used for. For example, a manufacturer designs a medicated feed for the control of coccidiosis and the feed tag will say “for control of coccidiosis”. The manufacturer simply states the intent of the product.

Feed companies will commonly use collective terminology which group’s ingredients into broader categories. As another example, corn or milo (grain sorghum) would fall into the Grain Products category and soybean meal or cottonseed meal would fall into the Plant Protein Products. This gives the feed company more flexibility to modify the product as necessary to take advantage of market movements. Minerals and vitamins are specified individually. Ingredients are to be included in the order of highest to lowest inclusion level.

Feeding directions will also be included on the feed tag. Feeding directions indicate how the product is to be fed to produce the results desired. If you alter the feeding plan, the results could change performance of even have dramatic effects on the animals. For example, broiler chickens are bred for efficient conversion of feed to meat. Altering diets of these rapidly growing birds can result in poor health, metabolic disorders, and even death of the animals. Be sure that when altering suggested diets you have consulted with a knowledgeable nutritionist with the feed company or a person who has experience in the industry.

A part-time hobby grower, a 4-H/FFA project animal, or large commercial ventures are all part of the food chain. They all need to produce healthy animals meeting the highest standards of Quality Assurance. They all need to read and understand feed tag information.

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