

# Myth and Fact: Antibiotics

## Dairy Delivers the Real Facts on Antibiotics

Dairy farmers follow strict rules regarding the use of antibiotics. Antibiotics **are not used routinely** for dairy cows and **never** added to their feed or water prophylactically. The cost of using unnecessary antibiotics is high, not only from the cost of the drug, but because the milk of a cow on antibiotics cannot be sold. If antibiotics are detected in a tanker of milk, the farmer must incur significant cost for the entire tanker and may lose the right to sell milk in the future.

**Each and every load of milk is tested for antibiotics multiple times and at multiple stages of the supply chain.**

This process is very effective and the actual incidence of antibiotic or other drug residues in milk is very rare. During 2023, more than 3.5 million tests were conducted on milk samples to detect antibiotic or other drug residues. Inspectors found less than 0.007% positive results for residues, and any milk testing positive was destroyed—it never reached the consumer market.<sup>1</sup>

Cow care is crucial to preventing infection and maintaining healthy dairy cows. There are a number of ways dairy farmers try to minimize illness:

- Cows receive regular veterinary care, including periodic check-ups, preventative vaccinations and prompt treatment of illness.
- Cows are housed as groups; new cows are carefully introduced to reduce new pathogens.
- Bedding is part of infection prevention. Beds are cleaned regularly and non-organic materials that don't support bacterial growth, like sand, are often used for cow comfort and infection risk reduction.
- Farmers train employees to notice changes in cow behavior and closely monitor the herd for early signs and symptoms of illness such as lethargy, reduced feed intake, fever and changed milk appearance. If a cow is experiencing symptoms, a complete evaluation is done.
- Many farmers use monitoring technology on their cows that tracks body temperature, steps, heart rate and more to help evaluate the health of their herd.



Antibiotics are only used when a cow is sick. When illness requires that cows be treated, antibiotics are administered according to strict FDA guidelines, which includes withholding milk from treated cows so that it never leaves the farm and cannot be sold or used for food for people. When a cow's milk is withheld, she is given special care and attention separate from the rest of the milking herd until her milk is once again free of antibiotics. Farmers keep detailed records to help ensure the responsible use of antibiotics.



**Since 2011, 0 retail-ready milk products have tested positive for traces of antibiotics. All milk is screened for antibiotics and any load that tests positive for a drug residue is discarded and never sold.**

Learn more about the great taste and health benefits of dairy foods at [www.Drink-Milk.com](http://www.Drink-Milk.com)

### References & Resources

<sup>1</sup> USDHHS/FDA/CFSN. 2023. National milk drug residue data base. Accessed 2024 May. Veterinarians, Farmers Share Goal Of Safe Milk. <https://www.usdairy.com/news-articles/veterinarians-farmers-have-shared-goal-of-producing-safe-milk-supply>  
FARM Animal Care Program. <http://www.nationaldairyfarm.com/antibiotic-stewardship>