

Survey of veterinarians suggests knowledge gaps regarding animal disposal following pentobarbital euthanasia of cattle and small ruminants

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Introduction

Veterinarians, animal owners, and the animal food industry share responsibility to properly dispose of euthanized animals and prevent pentobarbital from entering the animal food supply. To better understand current veterinary practices regarding disposal of animals following pentobarbital euthanasia so that targeted outreach could be developed, the FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM) and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) conducted a survey of AVMA members on euthanasia and subsequent disposal practices. This presentation will focus on the results of the survey as they apply to disposal of cattle and small ruminants and resulting planned outreach efforts.

Materials and methods

The survey was conducted over a 3-week period in 2021 and consisted of an email sent to a stratified random sample of 16,830 AVMA member veterinarians. The sample was stratified by species seen to ensure adequate coverage of various species. There were 2,093 responses received. Analyses were performed based on whether respondents only saw food-producing species or saw both food and nonfood-producing species, location of practice, time since graduation, and other factors.

Results

Veterinarians reported using pentobarbital for euthanasia of all species, including cattle and small ruminants. Some veterinarians reported using or recommending rendering as a carcass disposal method following pentobarbital euthanasia, including veterinarians euthanizing cattle and small ruminants. Rendering is not an appropriate disposal method after pentobarbital euthanasia because of the potential for adulteration of the

animal food supply. More than half of veterinarians reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that they explain the method of euthanasia to their client (74%) and that they advise their clients on disposal based on the euthanasia technique selected (69%). Some veterinarians reported a lack of familiarity with local and state laws (18%) or with federal laws (22%) surrounding use of pentobarbital for euthanasia and carcass disposal. More than half (51%) of veterinarians reported that they never or sometimes discuss with clients that use of pentobarbital to euthanize animals raises a concern for rendering the carcass.

Significance

The survey results suggest that veterinarians, including veterinarians in bovine and small ruminant practice, may benefit from additional education, outreach and resources regarding proper disposal of pentobarbital-euthanized animals to prevent adulteration of the animal food supply and to address environmental concerns. As a result, FDA CVM and AVMA are working on multiple resources and educational opportunities for veterinarians to address this.

