

## Food Safety



# Fact Sheet: Letter of Guarantee for Purchased Cattle

Dairy farmers are responsible for ensuring that the milk that is picked up from their bulk tanks is free of antibiotic residues. Farmers carefully manage the cattle in their herds to ensure that only milk fit for sale enters the bulk tanks. However, when farmers purchase springing heifers, lactating cattle, or dry cows, they may be introducing a risk to their milk and their bottom-line.

### What is the risk with purchased cattle?

Purchasing springing heifers, lactating cattle or dry cows can introduce many risks to your herd; however, this fact sheet focuses on only one of the risks: antibiotic residues in the milk from treatments administered by a previous owner. Recognizing that purchasing cattle is often a business necessity, you need to make sure that you manage that risk appropriately.

### What should I do when purchasing cattle?

The Food Safety program provides you with two options when you purchase springing heifers (less than 60 days before calving), lactating cattle or dry cows:

**Option 1:** Test the milk and ensure that it passes the official provincial regulatory test before shipping the milk. Record the test results in your Treatment Record so that you can refer back to it if you have a problem.

**Option 2:** Obtain a letter of guarantee from the previous owner. If you cannot do this because you have purchased an animal from an auction or the information is not available, test.

### What does the Letter of Guarantee need to include?

The letter of guarantee does not need to be a formal letter. It can simply be a note or memo at

the bottom of the bill of sale. The information should include:

- The animal's identification
- The date
- A declaration of no pending withdrawals or the details of the treatment
- A declaration of owning the animal for at least the last two months or a letter of guarantee from the previous owner or negative antibiotic test results
- A signature of the seller.

Alternatively, you can use the Sample Letter of Guarantee / Shipping Record in the Workbook.

### I am a Cattle Dealer, what does this mean for me?

You have two choices as a cattle dealer: you can leave it up to the buyer or you can be proactive and provide the information. If you decide to provide letters of guarantee on the animals in your business, you need to ensure that you have information dating back 60 days (which is based on the longest milk withdrawal on a product) or you need to test the milk and have a record that it passes the official provincial regulatory test. If you want to cover the animal's history, you can request the information on the bill of sale at each point, and then pass that information on to the buyer.

### **Testing is becoming more sensitive every day**

You also need to be aware that advances in science are improving the sensitivity of inhibitor tests at the processing plants. The more sensitive the test; the smaller the amount of antibiotic residues it can detect. Some tests are capable of detecting minute amounts of residues, some of which are far below the established safety threshold (i.e. the MRL or Maximum Residue Limit). The way the regulations are written, milk must not contain ANY residues. You need to be vigilant in your management of newly purchased animals to make sure that their milk is safe to ship.

### **I trust the person I purchased my cattle from, do I still need to test?**

Mistakes happen. Why would you risk a good relationship with a neighbour over an inhibitor penalty that was your responsibility to avoid in the first place? Milking is a critical control point on your farm because it is the last step in the process of producing milk where you can prevent treated milk from entering the bulk tank. You must cover this risk with newly purchased animals by either requesting a letter of guarantee or testing the milk for inhibitors. You have the option of choosing the method that works best for you; however, you are ultimately responsible to make sure that the milk you ship is safe.