

Time Is Now for Stewardship

Exceptional management will be increasingly important for the responsible use of antibiotics in food-producing animals

BY JIM KNISLEY

The watchword for the poultry industry going forward is “stewardship,” Dr. Lloyd Weber said at the Poultry Industry Council’s (PIC) Poultry Innovations Conference, held recently in London, Ont.

Stewardship implies responsibility, Weber said, and that now includes the responsible use of and responsibility for using antibiotics.

This responsibility has emerged and grown because of consumer concerns. These concerns may result in a quandary for farmers, but the choice facing them is stark. “What are we going to do about it — tell them they are crazy or provide what they want?”

It’s not just the consumers who want antibiotic-free (ABF) birds; quick-serve restaurants don’t want anything to do with the words “growth promoters” and the processors also want them because they see ABF as a way to gain market share.

Quebec has identified these concerns, and all antibiotics have to be prescribed. This includes over-the-counter-type antibiotics.

This is a long way from the situation in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the standard was what Weber called “shotgun therapy.” Standard practice was to blast away with an array of antibiotics. Typical of the era was the antibiotic cocktail that



**MANAGEMENT
WILL BE KEY**

A greater emphasis on management, or stewardship, is necessary to limit the use of antibiotics in poultry production.

all turkeys received at the hatchery.

Also in the 1970s, virtually every bird was treated for necrotic enteritis as a way to prevent a devastating disease. “Back in those days we had drug companies offering free diagnostic services in return for drug sales,” he said.

But times have changed. Vaccines were developed that made the shotgun unnecessary and barns, equipment and management practices have greatly improved, further reducing the toll of disease.

But antibiotic use remains a public concern. One way of addressing that may be to follow Quebec’s lead and require that all treatments be preceded by a diagnosis. This would ensure that the birds are being treated for the disease they actually have rather than being treated for something they might have.

“That would be a real good thing but I admit I have a vested interest in that,” Weber said.

Veterinarians operate under strict and straightforward guidelines, which