

Salmonella - See no evil.....

Written by Phil McGuire on 14 February 2018 in Opinion Plus
Opinion Plus

No one likes to talk about salmonella in feed, but the consequences of the recent formaldehyde denial mean we will be forced to talk about it a whole lot more, warns Phil McGuire.



Was the EU's formaldehyde ban reckless? | *Photo credit: Anitox*

Salmonella is on the rise in Europe.

This is forcing everyone involved in the food supply chain to answer important questions about what they can do to protect public health. This applies to consumers and sellers maintaining good hygiene practices, but it applies equally to producers involved earlier in the supply chain.

All animals must eat, and ensuring they can do so safely is a key part of the process that brings us safe food from farm to fork. Most people don't think about it, but keeping animal feed free from contamination is critical for preventing bacteria such as salmonella from entering the food we buy in

the supermarket.

No one likes to talk about salmonella in animal feed. Due to the public stigma attached to the bacteria, no producer wants to admit having it in their feed. As a company that specialises in helping food producers of all sizes prevent contamination and clean their feed, Anitox knows first-hand how little is said in public about the risk or prevalence of salmonella in feed.

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The stigma associated with feed testing positive for salmonella creates perverse incentives which are dangerous for public health: no producer wants to be considered a source of contamination so there is pressure either not to test, or to do only the bare minimum required by legislation or customer demands. There is also a pressure not to speak up about the need for salmonella control in feed or to dismiss salmonella as something that occurs only when good manufacturing processes are not followed.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Salmonella can and does occur in feed mills of all sizes with the highest quality programmes. Producers have to combat this through tight monitoring and the use of the best hygiene tools available. Chief among these tools is the chemical formaldehyde, the most effective tool for treating salmonella in feed. While formaldehyde has a bad reputation, it is actually a very versatile chemical that, when used carefully, comes in extremely useful for a variety of purposes.

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What is worrying, however, is that when the authorisation of formaldehyde was up for a vote in the European Commission, very few feed producers spoke up, precisely due to the stigma attached to discussing salmonella publicly. Many preferred to keep a low profile and let others fight for the authorisation. Many simply did not want to be identified as needing tools for salmonella control.

As a result, the Commission moved to ban formaldehyde in the midst of the worst salmonella crisis Europe has seen in years. This jaw-droppingly reckless decision came because few spoke up, and saving our best means of fighting the bacteria became 'someone else's problem'. Beating salmonella is hard, but if producers don't demand science-based decisions, and the regulators don't support them, then it becomes next to impossible.

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mean we will be forced to talk about it a whole lot more.

About the author

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