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FDA’s survey of milk finds few drug residues

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The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced results from its milk sampling survey, involving the testing of nearly 2,000 dairy farms for drug residues in milk. More than 99% of the samples are free of drug residues of concern-- underscoring the safety of the US milk supply. These findings provide evidence that the nation’s milk safety system is effective in helping to prevent drug residues of concern in milk, even in those limited instances when medications are needed to maintain the health of dairy cattle.

The agency initiated the study to determine whether dairy farms with previous drug residue violations in tissue derived from dairy cows were more likely to have violative drug residues in milk than other dairy farms. The FDA tested samples from two groups: a “targeted” list of farms with known previous tissue residue violations and a control group of farms. Results show that the occurrence of drug residues in milk is very low, even in the targeted group. However, the limited number of residues detected involved drugs that are not included in routine testing under the current milk safety program.

Despite the finding of a small number of drug residues in samples collected, the FDA intends to take steps to maintain the strongest possible system to ensure milk safety. The FDA will work closely with state regulators to consider modifying testing to include collecting samples as necessary from milk tanks on farms when investigating illegal drug residues in tissues involving culled dairy cows. The agency is also working with its milk regulatory partners to update the existing milk safety program, as necessary, to include testing for a greater diversity of drugs and to educate dairy producers on best practices to avoid drug residues in both tissues and milk.

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