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Food Safety challenges and opportunities:
International trade approach, veterinary drug residues

David Glenn Kennedy
Deputy Chief Executive Officer (Acting), Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute, Veterinary Sciences Division, Stoney Road, Stormont, Belfast BT4 3SD, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

The guiding principle of the EU towards food safety can be summed up in one phrase - "food shall not be placed on the market if it is unsafe". However, what does unsafe mean? This has been a point for discussion for more than 2000 years "Quod ali cibus est aliis fuat acre venenum" (Lucretius) translates as "one man's meat is another man's poison". Differences do exist in the perception of the safety of certain veterinary drug residues – e.g. ractopamine. This compound is permitted in some countries (USA, Canada, Brazil, etc), but forbidden in others (EU, China, Chile, etc). The adoption of an MRL for ractopamine by Codex, two weeks ago, is unlikely to resolve this issue. The EU maintains that the Codex decision was "not justified" because of outstanding safety concerns. The EU has a continuing requirement that any trading partner, wishing to license the use of ractopamine, must operate a "ractopamine-free" split system for that commodity. The EU may react to 3rd country threats to the food & feed chain by imposing special import conditions. These can range from export certification through to de-listing of the country. A case study will be presented, involving the self-suspension of freshwater shrimp exports from Bangladesh to the EU as a result of a massive increase in product rejections by the EU in 2008-2009 – as a result of violations associated with an illegal nitrofuran antibiotic. Subsequent studies showed that laboratory testing was flawed and that the residue occurred naturally in the shrimp.