When Oregano replaces antibiotic use in livestock and poultry, we all benefit. As more people are searching for clean, chemical and antibiotic free foods, farmers are beginning to see the possibility of leaving antibiotic use behind. If your goal is to raise healthy, clean food for your own family, this research is important to you too. How can a simple, common herb take the place of powerful antibiotics in the fight against disease causing bacteria? The answer is simple and complex. Oregano replaces antibiotic use in livestock and poultry when the animals are kept in clean, hygenic, conditions that are not favored by bacteria. This is a management choice and if handled correctly, does not need to lead to a significant amount of extra work. Lets take a look at what is natural and what is not, in a livestock animals living conditions.
Cattle, sheep, and pigs are natural foragers on pasture. They seek out the healthy plants and grasses, and each species has their own way of eating and processing food. Pigs eat, root, repeat. Alternating with napping, pigs find a varied balanced diet from an omnivore standpoint. They eat animal and plant proteins. Ruminants, such as cows, sheep and goats, alternate between grazing and processing, called rumination, throughout the day. As they wander the pastures, they eat, burn calories, and eliminate waste. When they have enough space, the animals move away from the waste manure so they are not eating near their manure where a whole different world of biology is occurring. If the animal moves away from this manure, they have little chance of ingesting the bacteria that is breaking down the manure.

Compare the above scene to confined animal feeding operations, CAFO’s. The animals in confined feed lot situations are tightly packed into a fenced area. They are under stressful conditions based on that fact alone. Then they are fed highly
concentrated grain feed. In many cases the animals are standing in their own waste. They are fed until they are large enough to be butchered for the highest profit. Under these conditions, bacterial illness can quickly decimate a herd. The answer for many years has been to prophylactically feed antibiotics to the herd as a feed additive.

This addition of antibiotics helped stem the incidence of bacterial disease, that is, until the bacteria became resistant. Then new, stronger antibiotics were introduced. Now, there is evidence that the meat from these animals can harbor antibiotic resistant bacteria that we are eating when we consume the meats. The theory is that this practice is leading to humans suffering from super bug illnesses that are not responding to the antibiotics available.

The Homestead Connection

How does this affect the way you, as a homesteader with a few animals or a small herd, raise your animals? Most small
Homestead owners take extremely good care of their livestock. This may be the family’s main source of eggs, meat, and milk. Making sure that the animal remains in good health is very important. When livestock is able to live in a sanitary, healthy, natural environment, the animal’s immunity is stronger and their health is better.

Now back to the oregano connection. Oregano contains a compound called carvacol. This substance, in conjunction with probiotic foods, leads to healthy gut enzymes and gut flora. Oregano replaces antibiotic use in livestock when fed in combination with probiotics and sanitary living conditions. Feeding both the fresh or dried oregano or the more concentrated oregano oil, consistently, has been shown to keep bacteria and parasite illness away. In addition, feeding oregano or oregano oil helps the animal’s intestines recover and heal from illness.

In the other scenario, animals that are already weakened or compromised, may not make a good recovery when treated with oregano or oil of oregano. Keeping the animal’s immunity strong is the key.
Making Changes

This past spring and summer I grew, harvested and dried as much oregano as I could. We lost a few of our older hens last winter to weakened conditions and opportunistic diseases. This year I have made some management changes in bedding, cleaning and feeding. The flocks will be receiving a daily dose of dried oregano or oregano oil in their water. I plan to sprinkle the dried herbs on the food, and in the nests.
Bigger feeding operations might want to look into some of the feeds or feed additives available commercially. Bayer Industries BY-O-Reg Plus is one option. If you didn’t grow oregano or didn’t preserve enough oregano, buying bulk dried herbs is another way to have enough on hand.

How does the Voluntary Feed Directive Affect Oregano Use?

Livestock, in the USA, accounts for over 80% of the antibiotics used. Antibiotics help the animals survive crowded, dirty, unnatural living conditions. The medications also contribute to larger, faster growth. As we near 2017, the antibiotics commonly found in livestock feed will no longer be added to the formulas. After January 1, 2017 producers will need what is called a Veterinary Feed Directive if they need to use a feed through antibiotic in livestock. This is intended to keep antibiotic use to a minimum in animals intended for slaughter and consumption.
The VFD, as it is referred to, will cause farmers and producers to keep the stock healthy in other ways. New products are being developed and released that will encourage healthy gut flora and subsequently keep the livestock healthy and less susceptible to disease. Manna Pro Feeds is releasing a new product called Opti-gut that enhances it’s line of milk replacers.

**Oregano Replaces Antibiotic Use in Farm Animals along with other good nutrition practices**

When oregano replaces antibiotic use in poultry and livestock you are enhancing the gut health of the animal. This is one way to keep the immune system of your farm animals strong and healthy. Not only oregano, but thyme, rosemary, sage and mint can help keep the digestive tract healthy and functioning properly. The connection between gut health and immunity is one we all need to become more familiar with as the livestock antibiotics are made more difficult to obtain without a vet visit. I am not promoting the thought of abandoning your farm vet in favor of diagnosing and treating illness. But economically speaking, homesteaders that depend on their animals for all or part of the food they eat, often cannot afford the cost of vet visits. Keeping your animals strong and healthy keeps vet visits to a minimum.
How Can You Start to Feed Oregano to Your Livestock?

If you didn’t grow huge amounts of herbs this year, start by buying bulk containers of culinary herbs. Sprinkle on top of the feed occasionally and see how your animals react to the addition. If they are anything like my crew they will gobble it all up and ask for more! Animals will largely self regulate eating herbs so you don’t have to worry too much about adding some herbs on a daily basis. I wouldn’t leave a large bowl of oregano out for them though, because more is not always better.

If you prefer to use Oregano oil in the feed or water you might be interested in this article. Bell and Evans Poultry producer abandoned the use of antibiotics in their meat chickens many years ago. They use oregano fresh, dried and in oil form to keep the poultry healthy and disease free. Please share how the VFD and the use of other products is working out on your farm. For more information on the VFD check this
article from Countryside Magazine. Let me know how oregano replaces antibiotic use works for you.