



FERALSTAT



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Product Profile and Position Paper

FeralStat™ is an oral contraceptive prescribed for management of feral cat colony populations. FeralStat is prescribed by a private veterinarian in Connecticut, U.S.

FeralStat

ORAL CONTRACEPTIVE FOR FERAL CATS

INTRODUCTION

FeralStat™ is an oral contraceptive marketed by and prescribed by a private veterinarian in Connecticut. FeralStat was developed by John Caltabiano, DVM, of Tait's Every Animal Matters (TEAM). The active ingredient is megestrol acetate (MA). (Please see ACC&D's product profile and position piece on MA at <http://www.acc-d.org/About> for more information.) FeralStat is prepared as a powder to be added weekly to food. Lactose, a milk sugar, has been added to make it taste good to cats.

HISTORY

In a conversation in 2008, Dr. Caltabiano reported having prescribed an oral contraceptive for feral cat colonies since 2001; he began marketing the product as FeralStat online in July of 2008. Dr. Caltabiano reported having distributed the product across the U.S. and abroad. Dr. Caltabiano passed away in late 2010 and FeralStat is now being prescribed by another Connecticut veterinarian.

MECHANISM OF ACTION

FeralStat reportedly uses a low dose of megestrol acetate (MA)—a dose as low as one-tenth the dose commercially prescribed for feline contraception. As a synthetic progestin that is orally active, MA works by negative feedback on brain centers that release FSH and LH, hormones that stimulate ovulation and sperm production.

USE AND EFFECTIVENESS

FeralStat is prescribed to be given once a week as a powder added to canned food. Some feral-cat colony managers report using it indiscriminately—feeding FeralStat to all cats in the colony—while others report taking care to treat only intact female cats. In interviews, several colony managers using FeralStat reported that they watched to make sure their cats ate all the treated food. They also removed leftover food to be sure there was no chance for exposure to other animals, whether wild or domestic.

MA has been shown to be effective at preventing pregnancy in cats, but at significantly higher doses than the levels used in FeralStat. A veterinary consultant to ACC&D interviewed several users of FeralStat. They reported satisfactory results—that is, no pregnancies and a generally healthy colony. However, no independent studies have been conducted to demonstrate the

efficacy of FeralStat.

COMPLICATIONS

Without independent studies on FeralStat use, it is not possible to report thoroughly on complications or side effects. Published data on side effects resulting from use of MA are readily available and a summary of these effects can be found in ACC&D's Product Profile and Position Paper on megestrol acetate. It is reasonable to assume that side effects would occur less often with FeralStat than at the doses at which MA has generally been used. However, this cannot be known for certain without any scientifically sound data.

CONCLUSION

If FeralStat works as previously reported by Dr. Caltabiano, it could be a valuable short-term tool for population control in feral cat colonies (until permanent sterilization of the colony can be achieved) if administered under very specific conditions (to ensure adequate dosage to target animals and inaccessibility to non-target animals). However, data is not available to demonstrate either safety or efficacy.

RECOMMENDATION

ACC&D recognizes that feral-cat colony caregivers often struggle against impressive odds to trap and sterilize all cats in a colony quickly enough to adequately control the population. We also realize that feral cats are subject to significant health and safety risks associated with mating and reproduction, and that these risks must be considered when assessing the risks and benefits of alternatives. However, we have several significant concerns about FeralStat, including the following:

1. FeralStat has not undergone any objective trials to establish efficacy or safety. For safety reasons, MA is only recommended as a contraceptive for cats in some countries (not including the U.S.) and only when the individual cat's age, weight, health, behavior, and reproductive status can be assessed and monitored before and during treatment. This level of monitoring is not possible with free-roaming, feral animals.
2. Materials marketing FeralStat include misleading statements. For example, the TEAM website states that MA (the active ingredient) has "FDA approval for off-label use as a feline oral contraceptive." In fact, the term "off-label use" means use other than as approved and labeled by the FDA. MA has not been submitted for, nor has it received, FDA approval as a contraceptive for cats.
3. Administration of FeralStat in food to free-roaming cats makes it difficult or impossible to ensure that target animals receive the adequate dosage and that non-target animals (including wildlife and roaming pets) do not consume the drug. Colony caregivers may be held liable if treated food is consumed by wild animals or roaming pets.

Experience with MA has varied by country. Some specialists with substantial experience with

the drug express concern over any MA use in cats, while others believe that MA can be used safely for feline contraception of owned, controlled, and monitored cats on a short-term basis. However, it is noteworthy that even these experts who believe MA can be used safely in cats have warned against any use in feral or free-roaming populations for the reasons noted above.

At this time—without data to show that FeralStat can be safely and effectively administered as intended—ACC&D cannot recommend use of this product.

REFERENCES

- Caltabiano, J., DVM. Personal communication. Multiple dates, 2008
- Jochle, W. 1991. "Pet Population Control in Europe." *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. 198(7): 1225-30.
- Kutzler, M., and Wood, A. 2006. "Non-surgical Methods of Contraception and Sterilization." *Theriogenology* 66: 514-25.
- Tait's Every Animal Matters website:
<http://www.everyanimalmatters.org/new.html#FeralStat>.

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