



What Are Probiotics?

Probiotics, also referred to as direct fed microbials, are live microorganisms that when fed will confer a health benefit to the host. By definition, the presence alone of live microorganisms in a nutraceutical, do not magically make it a probiotic. Nutraceuticals by law can contain live microorganisms and be labeled as direct fed microbials as long as they state they contain live microorganisms, however, if a product is labeled or marketed as a “probiotic” and does not have corresponding research to support that the microorganisms it contains actually confer health benefits to the host animal, it is not really a probiotic according to international scientific standards. Furthermore, if a nutraceutical is marketed as a “probiotic” but is not specifically labeled “contains a source of live (viable) naturally occurring microorganisms”, it is definitely not a probiotic.

In the last several years research across animal species resoundingly agrees that dietary supplementation with probiotics in humans, companion animals, livestock and performance animal’s results in health benefits such as:

- GI health and regularity
- Improved digestion and nutrient absorption
- Growth promotion similar to what is observed with antibiotic growth promoters and improved performance including:
 - Lactation, egg or meat production, antler or horn growth, etc.
- Improved feed to gain ratio
- Improved immune stimulation
- Improved ability to reduce the persistence/colonization of “bad bacteria” in the gut.

What we do not understand well is the wide variability in the effectiveness of probiotics, nor do we understand well the mechanisms for how these bacteria accomplish these health benefits. However, research in recent years had shed some light on these mechanisms enough to allow us to be smarter consumers for choosing probiotic products for our animals.

