

Policy targets should aim at ensuring responsible use of veterinary antibiotics

Brussels, July 2020: The EU Farm to Fork strategy published in May sets out proposals for legislative revisions and targets to ensure a transition in Europe to a more sustainable food system. EPRUMA welcomes the ambition of the transition and highlights that the livestock sector has already made great progress in working towards the antimicrobial use target outlined.

Targeting a 50% reduction in antimicrobial sales by 2030 is a very worthy aspiration, but given the background of already having reduced antimicrobial sales for animal use in Europe by one third in the past 10 years, we strongly question the ability to meet this target without severely negatively impacting animal welfare.

As EPRUMA, we insist on the widely accepted principles of “prevention is better than cure” and “as little as possible, as much as necessary”. As such, EPRUMA members stipulate that the target should be to reduce *the need* to use antibiotics, as well as to reduce antimicrobial resistance. Protecting animal health through other means and using antibiotics only when necessary, is the best way to reduce the need for antibiotic treatment.

Great progress has already been made in the animal sector, as was most recently highlighted in the [2019 European Court of Auditors report on AMR](#). On top of that, the European Medicines Agency’s [ESVAC report](#), now going into its tenth year of reporting on veterinary antibiotic sales in Europe, shows a **32.5% drop in sales** in the 25 countries which provided data for all years between 2011 and 2017. The recent policy recommendation requesting a further 50% of reduction in antibiotic use in animals on top of this 32.5% could bring about serious animal health and welfare consequences and endanger food safety.

Whereas the base year of 2017 has been indicated as the starting point for this reduction target, EPRUMA members believe that overall reduction in sales of antibiotics should be calculated from the beginning of Europe’s efforts, to include progress made so far and to make the target both realistic and achievable. We believe that Europe should be aiming for judicious use of veterinary antibiotics, in line with both our Responsible Use principles and the rules set out in the 2019 Regulations on Veterinary Medicinal Products and Medicated Feed.

Nobody would argue the fact that animals are sentient beings and that they deserve treatment when suffering from treatable infectious disease. The inability to treat an infection has serious implications for animal health, welfare and also for public health. If a bacterial disease can’t be treated in animals, the causative bacteria can spread, which can constitute a very significant risk for subsequent infections to in-contact animals and/or people, as well as potentially for food safety and security. We must also remember that there is no product yet available that may replace antibiotics in terms of capacity to treat bacterial diseases.

By ensuring good animal health and well-being through better housing conditions, better management, proper nutrition, vaccination and medicines, including antibiotics when needed,

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European Platform for the Responsible Use of Medicines in Animals

Europe's veterinarians and farmers can deliver on truly sustainable livestock farming which keeps animal health and welfare and food safety at the forefront of its objectives.

We should note however, that reduction in the use of antibiotics in animals, will not sufficiently address the challenge of antibiotic resistance, nor will it make a great impact on reducing the estimated 33,000 human deaths in the EU each year. As many scientific bodies and authorities have stated, [about 75%](#) of the total burden of infections with antibiotic-resistant bacteria in EU and EEA countries are associated with human patients and healthcare. The animal sector recognises that access to proper treatment for both humans and animals is fundamental. Therefore, we are committed to continuing our successful path to responsible use.

We now look to the new Common Agricultural Policy to ensure access to the tools and measures necessary to support and incentivise better animal health management, through improved disease prevention and animal welfare, leading thus to a reduced need to use antibiotics on farms. EPRUMA stands ready to support Member States in their review of the strategy and as regards achieving the goals based on their specific farming practices, animal health status, and veterinary capacity.

Ends

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Notes for editors:

EPRUMA is a multi-stakeholder platform linking best practice with animal health and public health. It aims to ensure best practice through responsible use of medicines in the prevention and control of animal diseases.

EPRUMA partners:

- AnimalhealthEurope: The voice of the animal medicines industry
- COPA-COGECA: European Farmers and Agri-Cooperatives
- Diagnostics for Animals
- EGGVP: European Group for Generic Veterinary Products
- FECAVA: Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations
- FEFAC: European Feed Manufacturers Federation
- FESASS: European Federation for Animal Health and Sanitary Security
- FVE: Federation of Veterinarians of Europe

Associate partners (National Responsible Use platforms):

- AMCRA: Centre for Expertise on Antimicrobial Consumption and Resistance in Animals (Belgium)
- RUMA: Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (United Kingdom)
- SDa: Veterinary Medicines Institute (The Netherlands)
- VETRESPONSABLE: Platform for the Responsible Use of Medicines in Animals (Spain)

For further information visit, www.epruma.eu

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