

19th May 2016

Alliance to Save our Antibiotics welcomes O'Neill report and calls on Defra to set ambitious targets to reduce farm antibiotic use

The Alliance to Save our Antibiotics welcomes the final report from the Antimicrobial Resistance Review (AMR) team, published on the 19 May. The report, which was commissioned by David Cameron and chaired by Lord O'Neill, calls for a reduction in the total use of farm antibiotics, and recommends the setting of 'ambitious' country-specific targets for the reduction of farm-antibiotic use in livestock.

The Alliance agrees that urgent global reductions to veterinary antibiotic use are needed, and is calling on the UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to set a target for reducing farm antibiotic use by 50% by 2020 and by 80% by 2025, including a target to cut the use of antibiotics classified as critically important in human medicine by 80% by 2020 and 95% by 2025.

Ideally targets for reducing antibiotic use should be set by species, once data on usage in each species becomes available, as use in intensively farmed pigs and poultry is many times higher than in extensively farmed sheep. Proportionally the UK has relatively few pigs and many sheep in comparison to most EU countries, which makes the average use per kg of meat produced in the UK appear fairly low. However, use per animal in pigs and poultry in the UK is at least 3.5 times higher than in Nordic countries and the Netherlands.

Emma Rose from the Alliance to Save our Antibiotics said: *"The final report from the AMR team is a welcome recognition of the contribution of farm-antibiotic to the rise of antibiotic resistance in human infections. We fully agree that urgent global reductions are needed.*

The Government must also put a stop to the routine preventative dosing of groups of healthy animals. Allowing such practices to continue in UK farming will undermine any chance of achieving the ambitious reductions targets we need to see. At present, the Government says it opposes routine preventative use, but it also says it won't take any action until forced to do so by the European Union. That kind of prevaricating isn't acceptable when faced with the threat of a post-antibiotic era."

The AMR team's report references the role of intensive farming practices can play in accelerating the spread of antibiotic resistance, and states that changes to farming systems to improve animal health must be part of the solution.

Peter Melchett, Policy Director at the Soil Association said: *"If we are to have a chance of tackling the antibiotic resistance crisis, we need to change the way we farm. Global livestock antibiotic use is forecast to increase by 67% by 2030, due to the expected increasing intensification of global livestock systems. We know that organic and extensive systems use far fewer antibiotics than intensive systems. If Defra is serious about reducing farm antibiotic use, it must help farmers shift towards higher-welfare and more extensive systems."*

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Notes to Editors

The Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics is an alliance of health, medical, environmental and animal welfare groups working to stop the overuse of antibiotics in animal farming. It was founded by Compassion in World Farming, the Soil Association and Sustain in 2009, and is supported by the Jeremy Coller Foundation. Its vision is a world in which human and animal health and wellbeing are protected by food and farming systems that do not rely routinely on antibiotics and related drugs.

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